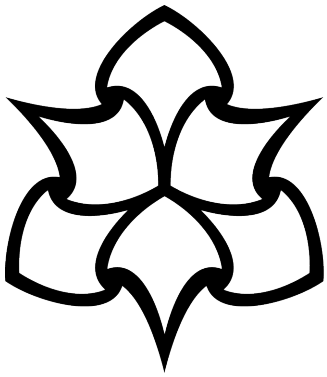

COVID-19 RESEARCH REPORT: The impact of the Pandemic on Community Sport provision and participation

Produced by

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In Partnership with:

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Acknowledgements

First thanks to the research team that worked together over the initial shock of the pandemic. The report, its findings, and the spirit of collaboration have shown what can be achieved during such pressured and complex times. Specific thanks to, in no order, the project researchers from Manchester Metropolitan University alongside our co-insight team partners Amber, Emily, Emma, Kenny, Iliana and Matt. We hope that this report can provide policy makers but most importantly communities and individuals with a viable route to returning to sport and physical activity. Our work remains only partly started. If you are interested in collaboration, please contact us at: c.mackintosh@mmu.ac.uk

Dedication

This study is dedicated to all the keyworkers that have worked so tirelessly during the pandemic to help individuals, families and local communities navigate the challenges and hardships of the global pandemic of 2020-21. Given the findings of this study, we also wish to acknowledge the vital role that sport workers have played alongside youth, community and realigned welfare provision.

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

This is a research report that includes a partnership collaboration study between Manchester Metropolitan University and five Active Partnerships (AP) in the north of England. Active Partnerships are strategic agencies for sport and physical activity that operate at a sub-regional level. The collaboration is also supported by evidence, insight and policy guidance from Sport England central research and evaluation team. The project has been discussed with Sport England. The core Active Partnerships that have been the geographical focus of this study include:

- ✓ Active Cheshire;
- ✓ MSP (Merseyside Sport Partnership);
- ✓ GreaterSport (Greater Manchester AP);
- ✓ Yorkshire Sport Foundation (Active Partnership for South Yorkshire and West Yorkshire);
- ✓ Active Lancashire.

The project will review existing information and literature on COVID-19 around the motivational changes, behaviours and societal challenges facing the sport and physical activity sector. Initial scoping of this literature review has indicated minimal peer reviewed evidence, with a reliance upon 'opinion-

pieces' and journalistic standpoints. Informal access to Sport England's research and insight team headquarters by virtual meetings in early May has already provided insights through their extensive national studies they have underway in sport and physical activity. Furthermore, Sport England have recommended a focus on research that:

- Increased understanding of issues of strategic importance (e.g. tackling inequalities, supporting specific audience groups e.g. BAME, women and girls, disabled and vulnerable long-term health conditions, lower socio-economic communities);
- Has an emphasis on groups whose activity levels are at particular risk from the direct and indirect impact of COVID-19;
- Addresses gaps in sector intelligence.

It has been established that a heavy quantitative skew in data collection is already well underway from primary and secondary sources (Spiers, 2020). Thus this study will 'deep dive' into the hidden voices and experiences of organisations and individuals within communities that are specifically low socio-economic status and aim to tease out nuances across, gender, age, ethnicity/faith and social class.

At this stage of the study, we are aware of a number of parallel national quantitative studies which will add further flavour to the findings of this report. At the time of writing the new national Active Lives data covering part of the lockdown(s) has also been released. Again, given the resources available to analyse this data within Sport England this is actively not an analytical focus of our efforts.

Key national studies already underway include:

1. Emergency fund of Sport England – secondary analysis of 'uptake' from businesses and organisations – secondary analysis of organisational types and delivery and distribution of this fund;
2. ONS opinions and lifestyles survey (additional survey questions on sport and physical activity under COVID-19);
3. ONS Active Travel and transport data analysis (pre, during and post survey data around COVID-19);
4. ONS Business sector 'code' data analysis around sport and recreation impact on COVID-19;
5. Sevanta ComRes OMNIBUS – now completed 12 waves of data set for COVID-19, total of 24,000 responses;
6. Evaluation of 'Join the Movement' – quantitative and qualitative study.
7. Series of collaborations with wider research partners and institutions e.g. MMU being one such partner.

SECTION 2: BACKGROUND LITERATURE

In December 2019 Wuhan in China reported an outbreak of a SARS-CoV-2 infection that causes COVID-19 disease, identified as an atypical pneumonia (Timpka, 2020). By March 2020 The World Health Organisation (WHO) classified it as a pandemic. To date, the bulk of initial early studies have focused on the sports medicine impacts around athlete training, return post-pandemic and implementation of mass gathering policies for sport (Halabachi, Ahmadinejad and Selk-Ghaffari, 2020; NieB et al., 2020; Timpka, 2020). The social organisation of sport in society, how individuals and groups behave is a core aspect of why government has sport policy. In the UK an increasing focus has been placed on the role sport can play in wider social policy goals such as community capacity building and mental health promotion (Coalter, 2007; DCMS, 2015; Sport England, 2016; Sport England, 2020).

This project will aim to explore little understood societal dynamics in the sport and physical activity sector that have resulted from the pandemic. It has already been stated that "collateral consequences of the pandemic will influence sport participation for a long period of time and require effective counter measures" (Timpka, 2020; 4). Specific early implications are around the role of national governing bodies (NGBs) in facilitating and restricting sport participation, what Timpka (2020) refers to as 'novel arrangements' for informal physical activity. An example of this is Norwegian FA's approach to football being around a maximum of participants, all two metres apart. This has not been done in the UK. Finally, there is a range of physiological factors that should be considered alongside sport participation in the context of COVID-19 (Halabachi et al, 2020).

Some authors have started to explore the implications of the cancellation of mass sport events, fixture lists and gatherings linked to physical activity (Parnell, Widdop and Bond, 2020). Neither is this new, Blumberg et al. (2016), for example, have explored the impact of the Ebola disease, contact risk and types of sporting events in Africa. It is clear that many professional leagues will be affected, that some countries will experience fluctuations in infection and death rates. However, this sphere of research, alongside the sport medicine domain of research (NieB et al., 2020) are not the focus of this project. Instead, what is currently missing from the existing literature is an awareness of everyday lived realities of citizens that have played sport, are part of physical activity communities and those that run and manage now silent spaces for sport under lockdown. Some initial early research from Sweden has shown that with 36,000 voluntary clubs there is a proposed series of "exit pathways". Characteristics here include; trial and error nature; country-by-country variations based on conditions and cultures; 'suppression and lift' then close down cycles; pleading for individual responsibility and testing of personal freedom balanced with social responsibility (Timpka, 2020a). This project will begin to tease out nuances, behavioural attitudes and multiple meanings attached to government policy and sport. A good comparison here with this Swedish case though is the very different societal, political and

ideological context of policy. Operationally we also have 151,000 sports clubs spread over 300 NGBs and 113 recognised sports. The UK is also a country with four devolved governments in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. Each having taken very different approaches to the pandemic across largely open borders.

As we move into a new period it can be argued that "having endured lockdown, re-opening society is likely to be a long term process around which little scientific consensus yet exists" (Timka, 2020a). Furthermore, whilst implications are considerable around professional and elite sport due their scale (Parnell, Widdop and Bond, 2020), this is perhaps a time when localised micro-politics of behaviour in sport coaching, community delivery and use of facilities has never been on a more level playing field. Australian sports medicine academics have now produced the *ABC Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) Framework* in April 2020. This was set up targeted at the 3 million children and 8.4 million adults cutting across high performance and community sport (Hughes, 2020). But, they also acknowledge a paucity of research in academic journals with athletic populations. The stepped approach to Australian 'return to sport' talks of individual restrictions through to small groups (like Sweden) but also factors in a 14-day free of virus symptoms to engage in this sporting setting. Final the level C is a return to full contact, competition and 'business as usual'. Interestingly, a frightening caveat at the end of the AIS proposal is "understanding that sport must proceed in a cautionary way and must not become a source of community outbreak of COVID-19" (Hughes, 2020; 5).

Key regional Sport, Physical research studies and insight from Active Partnerships

This project in it collaborative nature will audit and share insights from existing regional primary and secondary research. Table 1 below indicates current profile of regional studies underway and planned:

MSP (Merseyside Sport Partnership)	**Complete**	

Used GreaterSport Survey template (and added in mental health theme)	X	
Developing Club Survey – immediate challenge, digital presence and support	Ongoing	
GreaterSport		
Omnibus Survey (500 responses) SE themed and set of qualitative responses	X	
Individual resident of GM survey (700 responses) – attitudes and behaviours	X	
Qualitative study – residents in quant studies asked to volunteer interest	X	
Yorkshire Sport Foundation		
Priority Places Survey x 9 (seven completed) – people in communities	X	
Focus on communities in region through 'Yorkshire Evaluation Organisation'	X	
LDP area information gathering and coordination with local government	Ongoing	
Cheshire Sport		
Sport charity and business survey	X	
Phase 2 of survey (above) – under consideration/planning	TBC	
Active Lancashire		
Pilot of 1-2-1 interviews of businesses	X	
Development stage of a survey	Ongoing	

Table 1: Audit of current COVID-19 research studies into sport and physical activity participation and provision (March 20 – November 2020).

Again, there is insufficient space in this interim study to assess and interpret these additional 12 parallel studies. What it does show is that some form of meta-study would be useful for national lesson learning of all studies that are on-going in this area. We will also be using these studies to help inform our wider ongoing research on COVID-19 impacts.

SECTION 3: METHODOLOGY

The study has evolved iteratively through a process of collaboration with regional research and insight leads for each AP. The study was positioned specifically to support national policy in areas of insight deficit in England. Initial origins of the study emerged from informal conversations between Active Cheshire and Manchester Metropolitan University Department for Sport and Exercise Science in early April 2020 just after the March 17 lockdown. It was apparent that an opportunity was present for a Northern study that encompassed the more deprived areas of the UK in this region. Following consultation, the following research aims and objectives developed which underpin this report and the study more broadly.

Research question

What has been the impact of Covid-19 on the sport and physical sector in the North of England?

Aims

- ✓ To understand current and evolving patterns of sport and physical activity participation, behaviour and impacts on delivery systems due to Covid-19
- ✓ To explore the direct and indirect impacts of changes in attitudes, beliefs and opinions towards sport and physical activity
- ✓ To examine potential policy and practice implications around BAME, lower socio-economic groups and gender inequalities from changes in sport and physical activity delivery and opportunities.

Objectives

- ✓ To share initial data from phase 1 (March 20 – 5 May) between Lancashire, Cheshire, Yorkshire, Greater Manchester and Merseyside to develop insight, understanding and targeted areas of focus;
- ✓ To undertake a large scale qualitative project in a coordinated strategic research response across 5 regions with Manchester Metropolitan University
- ✓ To develop a dissemination plan and online national webinar conference in partnership Active Partnerships and key national partners.

Due to the highly sensitive nature of the project involving critical illness, unemployment, organisational closures/restructuring and lifestyle challenges around mental and physical health the project was approved under a full Manchester Met Ethical framework. Once achieved, all five partnerships were utilised to develop a sample of organisations and individuals for the study. This was a purposive sample, but, also one that very much relied on goodwill of people in highly challenging personal and professional circumstances.

In total we aimed to interview 35 individuals from BAME and lower socio-economic backgrounds and 25 organisations that represent these groups. We also aimed to sample to include a balance of individuals from varied backgrounds in terms of gender which we suspected was a likely significant social category although no evidence existed at the time of the original research. In the end we spoke to 22 organisations and 19 individuals, although fieldwork has been extended into the BAME group to try and further explore issues identified in the study. This is currently examining a further 11 interviews of diverse BAME respondents to further supplement the research data set and future research outputs. Likewise, a third phase of research is being planned to examine national stakeholder policy reflections on COVID-19 to shape lesson learning for the future and navigate an exit pathway sustainably for the sector.

Each AP was asked to sample five organisations using the following scope/size frame:

Size/scope	Characteristics (employees and volunteers considered as 'workforce')
Individual	Sole practitioner (coach, yoga instructor)
Micro	2-5 employees (social enterprise, coaching company, small volunteer club)
Medium sized	5-20 employees (Local Authority contracted out Trust function, youth club)
Mid-Large	21-100 employees (Gym, Leisure facility, Large Volunteer Sports Club)
Large	100+ employees (Local authority, Public Health)

Table 2: Breakdown of sampling framework of organisations interviewed within study

Each region covered a considerable geographical area and multiple local authority regions. Thus, we were not attempting to produce any form of 'representative sample'. However, we were proactively aiming to recruit 'hard to reach groups' through the established networks within the AP districts. It was apparent through the recruitment process that were differential standards of how 'close to the ground' APs were. As a strategic agency this is perhaps unsurprising. But, in terms of the voice of unheard communities we wanted to access it is a useful point of reflection in itself.

We recruited twenty individuals to the study all from areas or community settings classified as low socio-economic status by the APs. The breakdown is across individuals and organisations by social category is below:

Active Partnership Region	Organisational interviews		Individual interviews	
	Gender	**Ethnicity**	**Gender**	**Ethnicity**
Active Lancashire	2 male 2 female	1 British Pakistani 3 White British	5 male 2 female	1 British Asian 6 White British
Merseyside Sport	4 male 1 female	1 BAME 4 White British	3 male 2 female	1 BAME 4 White British
Active Cheshire	3 female 1 male	4 White British	Zero	Zero
GreaterSport (Manchester)	4 female 1 male	2 Black British 3 White British	2 female 1 male	3 White British
Yorkshire Sport Foundation	3 female 1 male	4 White British	1 female 3 male	1 Somalian British 1 British Asian 2 White British
Total breakdown	9 male 13 female	4 BAME 18 White British	12 male 7 female	4 BAME 15 White British

Table 3: Breakdown of sample by Gender and Ethnicity by organisational and individual interviews

(Note: BAME status is used if respondent did not state a specific ethnic identity but had responded to being interviewed as a BAME community member).

As table 3 above illustrates recruitment of only eight BAME community members across five APs shows the challenge of recruitment we faced during this highly complex period of research when specific concerns were expressed by the BAME community around COVID-19. We are cognisant of this limitation but have also sought to follow up this phase of the research with further supplementary research to address this. Likewise, we also had to adapt our research methodology to accommodate a number of respondents who did not have access to a laptop for the planned Zoom research. This methodological issue and isolation and 'disconnection' is reflected in the themes of the study which will be discussed later.

All interviews were transcribed fully verbatim and recorded via telephone or secure Zoom platform via pre-arranged interview schedule. Once transcribed the team split into two research analysis teams around the organisational and individual data. Ahead of analysis a literature was undertaken to identify appropriate theoretical frameworks to shape the coding of the 41 hours of interview data. From this meta-themes or categories were identified and sub-themes or 'codes' attached to individual quotes from the raw data. Meetings were undertaken within the two sub-teams to identify common understandings,

but also debate and discuss areas of coding meaning and re-interpretation. From this process codes were constantly reshaped and themes strengthened. Cross-team presentation of findings was then used as way to shape rigor of the findings and cross check for other emergent and connecting themes between organisational and individual understanding.

It should also be stated, at this point that the aspiration of the project is to develop a series of research papers from the data contained within this project and to potentially seek research partners for future follow up with our data on a number of themes. These papers will emerge over the next year and cover broader themes than the narrow focus of this report for the Active Partnerships that supported the project.

SECTION 4: Societal impact on community sport and physical activity provision in England

Across the 41 interviews undertaken, in what we understand to be the largest qualitative academic study covering the period from March 17th to the end of October 2020 in the United Kingdom we have identified a number of societal level themes present across the provision of community sport delivery. It should also be noted that at this phase 1 stage of the study a further five BAME participant interviews are also being sought.

Fear and uncertainty of return to sport

It is clear from the research evidence across both organisations representing thousands of individuals and at the micro level of individuals themselves that fear and uncertainty was a key theme emanating from the data analysis at a societal level. Earlier data also illustrated that a high proportion of individuals in the 24,000 survey over 6 months experienced worry around exercise. In addition to this, one community sport youth organisation employee argued,

> "it's a worrying statistic that a lot of our parents are working low income, self-employed, zero hours. Taxi drivers, night economy workers, take-away workers, they're not earning the biggest amount of money. I think that has an impact on our community as well. That's why we're not going forward to get tested because we're worried, "Who's going to look after my five kids if I've got to socially isolate for 14 days? I'll lose my job." In today's climate you can lose your job and somebody else will take it within minutes.
>
> (Alan, Community Youth Football Organisation, Lancashire)

Following on from this, a Greater Manchester participant explained,

> "my life is 100% sport and that comes in me personally, and my family. I just felt like everything have been taken away abruptly, everything I'm passionate about, I felt had disappeared ... "If I didn't have a sport, what do I have that's personal to me?" Obviously, I have my family and my children, but we're still entitled to have something that's your own identity ... Yes, it's who I am. It was just almost like it was gone and it was lost, and it didn't mean anything, so I had to find ways to reinvent myself ... self-esteem was low during the middle of the lockdown, due to not being as active as I normally am ... it's my identity. It's who I am, and I've never lost that before. To really have that lockdown time to reflect, this is why it's important. It's not just because I want to keep fit, it's because it's just a part of my makeup, it's just who I am, it's how I let off a bit of steam, it's how I enjoy my time socially"
>
> (Jen. Greater Manchester)

This lost identity is set within a wider community climate which is vital to locate the project within as whilst sport is important the parental, family and community priorities in the deprived areas this study was based within illustrated complex factors around child care, work and employment and zero hours precarious economy as fundamental contextual factors to be aware of. For others the specific uncertainty and anxiety around community sport, and future return to sport was evident;

> "For (the) middle ages and onwards, we found in sport, each season, no matter which sport it is, it will be, "I'm going to retire next season. I'm going to retire next season." It seems to be that this is the time when they've said, "Yes, well, actually now I am. This is my out," and so people have looked to do different activities instead. A lot of people have taken up cycling, and because of the nice weather, and the lockdown, et cetera, they can't see, and really they're finding it difficult to find a reason to come back and do squash because they've enjoyed doing that. The thoughts of returning to an indoor sport seems to have put a lot of people off".

(Julie, Community Sport Organisation, Cheshire)

> "I think we found a lot more people more anxious. We've had a few people who haven't wanted to come to a group because of COVID".

(Alan, Community Sport Organisation, Lancashire)

> "I think it'll be so down to an individual and their experience of COVID and the lockdown as to what they will do. I'm sure it's the same across my friendship group, your friendship group, that there's people who have varying degrees of willingness to engage in social activities or access in the gym or leisure facilities and things. I'm quite happy to go out because I'm willing to-- not take the risk, but I understand the risk, that as long as I follow all the advice and guidance, that I should be all right. I completely understand why there's other people who are slightly more risk-averse to that".

(Sam, Local Government Officer, Yorkshire)

Further themes related to this will be drawn out within this report that relate to the specifics of organisational impact and individual enablers and barriers to participation.

Disconnected sport delivery system

The sport system is at best complex and at time challenging for individuals and communities to navigate. The last ten years of a more austere and financially restricted public sector in sport (Widdop et al, 2019) has already provided a fruitful context for the COVID-19 pandemic to generate additional 'ripple effects'. Broad societal context for the report is also important which this research evidence has identified as a powerful theme around 'disconnection' this is both in terms of individual and family isolation and disconnection from important social functions (including sport activities). But, it also covers disconnection within the sport system which will be covered later in the report. Two very typical quotes from the data are seen below,

> "Mental health has been massive anyway for everybody and trying to keep everybody safe and well, I guess it's hard to know how it's truly affected those people who can't talk to you directly.

> Some of them don't have phones so you can't ring them, some of them don't have obviously Facebook and social media. You can't even connect that way, you can send them a letter, but they can't read and write. How do you communicate with someone if they're not in front of you".
>
> (Liz, Community Sport Club, Cheshire).

> "I was talking to a really good friend of mine yesterday, and we've really not been in touch very much with each other over the last six months. I said this and he agreed about him as well, I said that I've just got a bit lazy about keeping in touch with people, got quite settled in some ways into being at home and having a new routine that is bounded by our immediate family and the four walls here ... my going outside of those boundaries and making an effort to keep in touch with friends has definitely fallen away quite a lot. I've got a bit more lazy about doing that"
>
> (Sam, Greater Manchester)

The division between different groups and how there are differential degrees of disconnection can also be evidenced by this perspective from a local government officer,

> "obviously, that (lockdown) impacted on their exercise levels, but also their social levels, their social interactions as well. So that's not been a good thing because they haven't been able to exercise, obviously, while we've been in lockdown, people who have been motivated still have the ability to have to come out and done their own thing, or maybe gone with a friend or a family member. Those motivated people tend to be the people who are the leaders that we trained up. Obviously, they haven't been having direct links with their groups as such, who use to meet weekly"
>
> (Laura, Local Government Wellbeing Service, Yorkshire)

Similarly, as organisations sought to engage in interventions to deal with the 'ripple effects' of the pandemic through society and sport provision it is clear that the ability to identify need under the COVID-19 distancing direct and indirect circumstances was challenging,

> "I think it'll just be harder to identify where these individuals are that probably need that intervention the most".
>
> (Sam, Local Authority City Council, Yorkshire)

The services and community sport and physical activity system has also under gone an unexpected and unprecedented 'shock'. Ability to communicate to and across organisations to individuals also became considerably harder. For example, one individual suggested,

> "In response to COVID at a community level, we haven't really spoken to community members. It's mostly been feedback from the community organizations that we've been able to find out how the residents are coping with COVID. Obviously different methods like social media and then the resident pages, et cetera.
>
> (Dan, Public Health and Wellbeing Service, Yorkshire)

Another highlighted a common nuance of the new ways of working that emerged in the workforce,

> "In terms of my manager, I haven't spoken to her really that much instead of speaking to her each day in the office. I spoke to her maybe once a week, maybe once every other week. That's been more distant. I think it's not being in an office together has obviously hit people hard, I think.
>
> (Mark, Community Sport Organisation, Merseyside)

For the public health agency to not be able to establish resident's individual health, needs and behaviours shows the need for studies such as this but also a weakness in some areas of the system in the context of an unplanned pandemic.

Loss of identity, trust and vulnerability

Whether individuals are active participants, coaches, volunteers or employees within the community sport system it is clear that considerable lost individual identity, trust and perceptions of vulnerability are present throughout the post-lockdown period since March. Within this theme a constant feature was the hard to reach becoming harder to reach as part of a conscious retreat from provision and contact, such vulnerability is identified in the following passage of conversation,

> "I think that those that don't have the support network again will have been very dependent on the voluntary sector and the friending schemes and the phone calls they've been receiving. Which so much of this just comes back to trust. That if the trust was already there, I think it will be easier for those people to bounce back and engage in provision. I think if those people were relatively isolated anyway, I think it will have just pushed them-- I think they'll just be the harder to reach going forward.
>
> (Sam, Local Government City Council, Yorkshire)

Vulnerability is also subtle and with multiple nuances that can be evidenced by this comment around post 'opening up' of services still being a period of concern around trust and vulnerability,

> "Now things have opened back up, I believe that a lot of people's fears again is that closeness or they feel like if they've gone out and they're working somewhere, things look a lot busier than what they should be".
>
> (Liz, Community Sport Club, Cheshire)

This study is firmly located in areas across five regions of multiple designations of deprivation. It also includes some of the regional hubs of greatest cases, concentrations of COVID-19 impact in the North

of England. The feelings in some areas also overlapped with prejudice and exclusion based around income levels and sport provisions. For example, a community youth service provider argued,

> "Our local leisure centre is not open. We have the one in a more affluent area, may I call it. It's open. Says it all.
>
> (Mohammad, Youth Organisation, Lancashire)

With multiple factors at play driving such vulnerability, lack of trust and exclusion it is apparent that this is impacting on individuals sense of self and individual identities. One club with around 30 coaches servicing 1300 members highlighted the workforce impact in community sport for them,

> "These are very proactive, busy people normally, so to go through all that busyness with all that contact and it's a very sociable activity as well to nothing, it's not like accountants that generally sit on their own desk and they could work from home, no. The impact on the coaches was huge".
>
> (Lucy, Community Sport Club, Cheshire)

This section of the report is aimed at providing a contextual understanding of the population in this study, but, extrapolated out to population and societal levels. The three themes interconnect with and overlay many of the forthcoming issues and recommendations of the report. It is intended to offer rich, textured and nuanced data that also challenges simplistic understandings of life in lockdown. Indeed, it is clear that many of the impacts will not be understood for many years. At this stage we hope that the report findings in the next two sections can provide pragmatic lesson learning for all Active Partnerships in England, but also community sport provision in local government, the private sector, schools and the voluntary sector. Finally, the last word is left to a public sector worker who perhaps most succinctly sums up the experience of the sector and wider society during this six-month period,

"COVID tested our mission statement, our purpose to the call. COVID presented the greatest risk to our beneficiaries and our purpose. Strategy overnight had to become to safeguard local lives".

(Paul, Community Sport Enterprise, Merseyside)

SECTION 5: The impact of COVID-19 on community sport and physical activity organisations and delivery provision in England

It is known from the central government statistics based on a survey of 6000 businesses that the sport and recreation sector (alongside arts) is the most gravely hit sector by COVID-19 (NOS, 2020). This is both in terms of organisations that have drawn on the furlough system and those that have implemented employment reduction. The focus of this section is on gaining a better understanding of the responses and impacts of the pandemic as it shaped the community sport sector between March 17th lockdown and September 14th before the second lockdown. This second lockdown (at the time of writing the report(is ongoing until the start of December and the purpose of the timing of this report is to also inform policy and practice around the future phases of lockdown (or not). It seems a return to restricted formats of community sport is now to be recommended, but this is a highly fluid state of decision making that can shift with any public health announcement.

To help make sense of the considerable qualitative data set in this section of the report a theoretical framework was drawn upon that is drawn from the organisational change management theory literature (Boyne, 2004). This framework is used in contexts where organisations and economies transition from periods of 'shock' with management strategies used to translate such considerable shifts into survival techniques in facing downturn. Hence, the theoretical roots being in organisational change management and management approaches to economic 'shocks' was deemed a useful frame for analysis. At its core, the theory suggest organisations respond in three categories of ways, firstly *retrenchment* where efficiency gains, stability and financial changes are made such as cost cutting and 'tightening' of fiscal controls. The second phase, which may not run in a linear manner per se is *repositioning* where innovation and reallocation of resources into new and diverse routes to survive the system shock are undertaken. Finally, there is more of a wholesale *restructuring*, this might be aligned to staff redeployment in local government for example to core frontline emergency services, the government's Furlough scheme and organisations taking more macro decisions to shift the form, function and scope of what they do.

It was suggested that this was a powerful 'sense-making' theoretical framework in what was a highly dynamic public health driven context but that had global economic implications for national, regional and local economies. Many of the organisations we spoke to were micro level agencies through to local government agencies with variable scope and size of organisational remit and employment base. What was consistent across all 21 agencies was the close links to the previous societal themes mentioned in section 1 with regards to fear, anxiety, disconnectedness and lost identity. It is however, worth acknowledging that perhaps in parallel to the individuals later in this report there were also high levels of innovation, adaptability and use of technology as a strong macro narrative running through the sport and physical activity sector. Alongside, this main theoretically informed analytical framework other themes then emerged from the data and further theory and conceptual ideas were drawn upon to shape the future academic analysis around COVID-19. This is not included within this report as the target audience is policy makers, organisations in sport such as Active Partnerships and other national stakeholders such as NGBs and local government.

Sample for the BICS survey broken down by industry			
	Total Number of Surveys Sent Out		
Industry	Workforce Size < 250	Workforce Size 250 +	Total
Mining And Quarrying	31	13	44
Manufacturing	4039	1350	5389
Water Supply, Sewerage, Waste Management And Remediation Activities	227	77	304
Construction	3247	317	3564
Wholesale And Retail Trade; Repair Of Motor Vehicles And Motorcycles	5554	1207	6761
Transportation And Storage	1454	340	1794
Accommodation And Food Service Activities	3307	651	3958
Information And Communication	2256	416	2672
Real Estate Activities	433	95	528
Professional, Scientific And Technical Activities	4444	695	5139
Administrative And Support Service Activities	3373	1051	4424
Education	570	446	1016
Human Health And Social Work Activities	1115	168	1283
Arts, Entertainment And Recreation	1039	289	1328
Other Service Activities	524	32	556
All Industries	31613	7147	38760

Table 4: Sample size of the British Industry COVID-19 Survey November sample 2020 (NOS, 2020)

In Table 4 above we can see that the arts, entertainment and recreation sector had 1328 surveys distributed, of these 361 responses were received accounting for only 27% of the sector. When considered across the diversity of the sector this does not yield positive representation of the national picture. For example, estimates of sports clubs vary between 151,000 in the UK (SRA, 2013) to around 77,000 in the 'club count' undertaken in 2017 (Shibli and Barrett, 2017). Likewise a parallel study of Datahub's 900 leisure centres showed a 43% drop by week 11 of 2020 (pre-lockdown) and 65% drop for those aged 75-84 years old (UK Active, 2020). This illustrates the importance of sector information that is sensitised to the needs of the providers and populations. A 361 survey of everything ranging from cinemas to theatres to sport provision and venues does not capture the heterogeneity of a complex set of landscapes.

Retrenchment

Reduction in service

A common theme in the organisational change literature in response to managerial tactics driven by economic or societal shocks is retrenchment. This is where organisations and businesses revisit their capacity based around principles of efficiency and stability. This was a clear area of action as a result of lockdown for community sport sector. For many of the community-based and third sector organisations they explained a reduced service as a vehicle for survival. For example,

> "In terms of the actual organization, we did get the full grant from Sport England, we've got 10,000 from Sport England. We were extremely lucky to get that because I know, not everybody did, but we've got really big bills to pay. We had that, and that helped us to stay afloat. We also had, although we did lose over 50% of the club, we still had an amount that was coming in to help pay for everything. We managed, and we managed it well. We come back and we now-- Well, if I was to tell you we are only 150 members from being a full again"
>
> (Liz, Community Sports Club, Cheshire)

> "We've really focused on that. In fact, we did some community work and got some funding to focus on that being very aware that we are a members club. We reduced fees and things and actually got some funding and got some equipment because the last thing we wanted to do was limit who could access the club particularly when everything else was shut down, tons of

> facilities were shut down, parks were shut down, and we provided equipment. I'd like to think that it hadn't impacted who could access because we made sure that the facility was there for all and made it obvious that people could access"
>
> (Julie, Community Sport Organisation, Cheshire)

In terms of the scale of reduction this varied by region, locality and sub-sector of the organisational workforce. One youth organisation in Lancashire estimated,

> "On average we see about 120 young people a week. About 10%, I'd say, we no longer see them now. During COVID-19, we're restricted. Today we're restricted to 25 maximum in a bubble of five. One member of staff to five young people. I know we're restricted, but when we have a WhatsApp messenger link with our young people and families. Those, I've noticed, at least age range 12 to 16, I've lost about a dozen in that age group who don't even connect with us. When I speak to their parents they're like, "He won't come over. He's lost hope." They don't want to come. Today I noticed again, we are seeing them, what can I say? Unhealthier. They've been eating a lot over lock down"
>
> (Alan, Community Youth Football Organisation, Lancashire)

This illustrates some of the complex factors that also lay behind reduced delivery. Part restriction, part demand and wider societal concerns and impacts of this limiting capacity for physical activity. These themes are explored further in the section on individual participation later in the report.

Restrictions due to the pandemic

The obvious limits of COVID-19 restrictions also featured in how organisations were navigating delivery and operations. For those that did respond this often centred on targeting those with the greatest need. For example,

> "Our specific response during this unprecedented global pandemic has been to establish a plan that enables the two remaining employees to continue to put the metal health and well-being of our young people at the heart of our delivery during this critical time...Very quickly we were also able to identify the support required to those in the most critical need"
>
> (Alicia, Youth Sport Organisation, Greater Manchester)

Another sports club leader, and coach, in her interview went on to explain how this restriction was a driver of the 'offer' they provided,

> "Once COVID come in, we developed a dance. We looked at what sports can be transferred over to an online offer quickly. Dance was one that would work well as it was in some ways individual sport, and in some ways, it's not like a full-contact team sport, you could do it in isolation… boxing, again, we did the same, a little bit longer to get up and running"
>
> (Claire, Community Sport Club, Greater Manchester)

Physical restriction led to natural delivery restrictions and challenges and, as a consequence, reduced capacity,

> "Everybody tries to get to the car park, like I said, but that isn't practical and isn't-- especially without use of toilets. We're not allowed to use the building at all. We're basically trying to run an outdoor youth centre, which I guess in like a hot country would work but not in Liverpool and Anfield"
>
> (Stan, Youth Centre, Merseyside)

Restrictions in lifestyle are an overriding theme of much of the data, but in this section we specifically focus on its role as a retrenchment tactic and management response in community sport organisations.

Financial management and survival

Given the considerable financial shifts in the economy and organisations navigating the global public health crisis fiscal survival was fundamental. As already stated, the recreation and arts sector due to its very nature of public gatherings, and in sports case sub-two metre contact, is the sector most badly hit by Furlough, unemployment and financial challenge (NOS, 2020). It has been suggested that a six month restriction on the sport and active leisure sector could cost 700 million lost visits and be worth up to £2.1billion (UK Active, 2020). When asked about how they were managing such requirement to save money, and survive reaching out to external funders was key. For example,

> "I think what was amazing and really early on was that Sport England. I think within 10 days,.. two weeks, had come back and had had conversations on most of those projects about being completely flexible on how that money was spent, because, the initial outcomes and outputs of those projects weren't going to be viable in the timescales that were given. They've been fantastic in being flexible on timescales, what it is that we do and very much them driving the message that, "Tell us what communities need and if you have the funding, we'll do our best to make sure that you can spend it where that demand is." I think that's been brilliant"
>
> (Sam, Local Government Officer, Yorkshire)

> Funders have been quite open and helpful in that in terms of not saying, "Well, that stopped and I know that you paid venue hire here and now you're not, so I'm going to take that off you."
>
> (Claire, Community Sport Club, Greater Manchester)

Pre-lockdown approaches to financial management such as sustainability of external funding also had obvious implications for the post-lockdown economic and public health 'shock' to the system. This appears to be a key theme in term of 'wider preparedness',

> "We've always worked to have a blended diverse economy of funding so that we're not over-reliant in one area for specific areas are going to get hit that"
>
> (Claire, Community Sport Club, Greater Manchester)

Furthermore, whilst Sport England flexibility in funding targets and emergency funds were highlighted as vital lifelines for many organisations. This organisation from Cheshire highlighted sustainability of small grants and the medium to long-term impacts, not just on delivery and organisations, but as a result of isolation and mental health effects on young people.

> We were fortunate we received £4000 from Sport England towards costs that weren't covered in the grant in the council, so we got that. Then going forward, I am anticipating that there will be funding available that looks at-- It might not be sport specific, but the funding that looks at the impact of COVID on social isolation, mental health, and things like that. We will look at programs that promote active participation. I am hoping, presuming perhaps to an extent that Sport England will be back to look at sustainability. My God, they've got a huge portfolio to look at, haven't they?
>
> (Julie, Community Sport Organisation, Cheshire)

The commitment of third sector organisations to work despite impact of the pandemic can also be seen in how they faced up to the challenge,

> No, we were quite lucky that we've got some emergency funding to cover us working online and the phone calls, so we were all right. We would have carried on doing it anyway.
>
> (Craig, Community Sport Enterprise, Lancashire)

COVID-19 as a driver of efficiency practices

Reaching out for Sport England, local government, crime commissioner and charitable funds (e.g. Rotary Club) is an important theme within the data around the efficiency, survival management turnaround strategies (MTS) we uncovered. But alongside this obvious step was the multitude of new organisational practices in varied club, local government, NGB and sport enterprise settings that allowed innovation to develop. The specific innovations will be covered in the forthcoming section. For example the specific benefits of COVID-19 to forcing efficiency and system change was flagged by John who worked in the delivery of physical activity and health projects for older people,

> At the absolute core of that is going to be achieving our new target operating model and something called Project Mercury which is our digital translation project. It sits within that. Because of COVID, we will, through that project, automate every process that we possibly can to actually enable the slickest operation of the organization that we possibly can so that we can focus the majority of our biggest resource, which is our people, on the work we actually do direct with beneficiaries rather than systems and processes that sit behind that.
>
> (John, Physical Activity for Older People Project, Merseyside)

Ryan highlighted similar efficiency gains that are likely to shift practices in the sector for good,

> I'm interviewing someone tomorrow. That's going to be on FaceTime interview, there's no need to bring him into the building. The technology has been amazing. It's made people more efficient in some ways, hasn't it?
>
> (Ryan, Community Sport Organisation, Cheshire)

This said the subtle digital divide within communities and across regions in Active Partnership remits has also been identified. One participant argued that immaterial of this exclusion aspect it will force agencies to think about how they engage people so as not to exclude,

> "As much as social media has its place, we've got a lot of people that are digitally excluded that means that we've got an aging population, but how do we ensure that people are engaged and understand what the messaging is and what is good for them and all that stuff. I think some of the longer-term challenges will still remain, but I think it's provided everyone with an opportunity to reflect and think about how we can work more effectively, more dynamically to engage different audiences"
>
> (Sam, Local Government Officer, Yorkshire)

At the greatest level, the management shock of COVID-19 to the organisations delivering sport and physical activity were seen incredibly positively and even transformational,

> "At the absolute core of that is going to be achieving our new target operating model and something called Project Mercury which is our digital translation project. It sits within that. Because of COVID, we will, through that project, automate every process that we possibly can to actually enable the slickest operation of the organization that we possibly can so that we can focus the majority of our biggest resource, which is our people, on the work we actually do direct with beneficiaries rather than systems and processes that sit behind that"

(John, Physical Activity for Older People Project, Merseyside)

Redeployment

For employees in the sport and physical activity public sector due to the emergency response nature of the pandemic they were often redeployed to 'frontline' areas of need. For Sam the six week lockdown meant a very different role explained below,

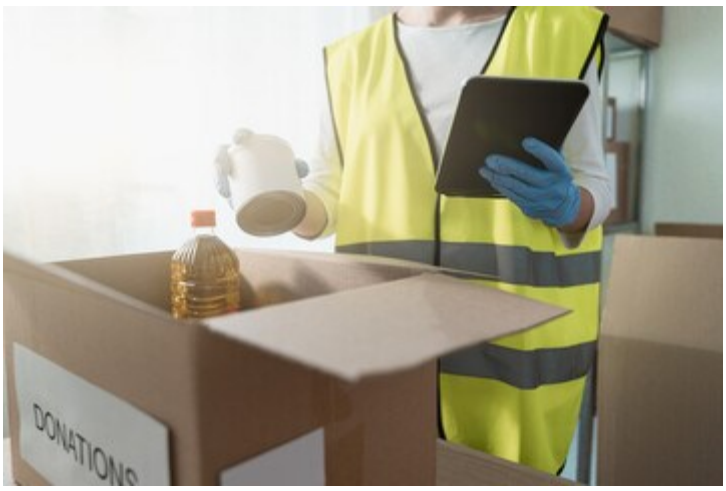
> "There's three of us that primarily work on sport and physical activity and we were all redeployed into bereavement services for six weeks. It's one of those ones where you try to keep things ticking over and things happening. It felt like the whole city came to a bit of a pause for probably a month period where people were trying to figure out what it was that was happening, what you can and what you can't do"

(Sam, Local Government Officer, Yorkshire)

The same approach was identified in Merseyside,

> "We'd had already started thinking about what COVID was going to look like if it hit our communities. We made a decision in February to redeploy all of our staff to an emergency frontline service focusing on shopping, prescription collection, well-being. We actually mobilized that overnight and set something up. It meant that when we hit lockdown, we'd got about 400 new volunteers registered with us as well to actually deliver that response"

(John, Physical Activity for Older People Project, Merseyside)



The impact of this was seen by some as positive, where they had a sense of volunteering to help with the societal impact of the pandemic,

> "I guess there's only so much that you can do, as I say, it felt like a very staggered approach and understandably so. It was critical service were prioritized, but that was one of the reasons why I was quite happy to be redeployed because it felt like I could do something and give a little back rather than just sit and wait for someone to tell me to crack on"

(Craig, Local Authority, Yorkshire)

Retrenchment and 'management turnaround strategies' associated with this theoretical area saw highly pragmatic applications across all five Active Partnership regions. Efficiency gains and survival tactics in terms of cost cuts at the most day to day levels were experienced from large Local government and Public Authority agencies through to the smallest sports clubs and community youth agencies.

Repositioning

In the next area of the Boyne (2004) model organisations reposition. This means they adapt, rebuild and offer new innovations to survive in a new market. The post-lockdown marketplace for sport and physical activity was something few had predicted. The ability to innovation and be entrepreneurial using new formats, delivery styles and ways of communicating provided intense and difficult challenges for some. In other cases organisations responded quickly, mobilising hidden volunteer workforces to deliver support and community welfare services way outside the 'brief' of community sport. Perhaps future studies could examine the underlying responsiveness and potential for innovation that seemed to vary so considerably in the wider sport system.

Adaptability

A powerful theme in the data, that cut across many organisational contexts in the North of England was that of adaptability. In the case of some sport sector employees this was vital to their future existence it arguably drove much of their tasks in the early phase of lockdown 1.0. Such evidence can be seen in the following quotes.

> "No, because the participants are sort of, they are volunteers in effect, some of them, with the walk leaders, with the people in games in chairs, some of them are under their own organizations. We just train them up and then they're under their own sport networks. To be fair, we don't have a WhatsApp group or Facebook page for these volunteers prior to this. We weren't in a position to do it that way...There's a website page, but it's not interactive obviously for the walk leaders. Yes, we're still, very much pen and paper"
>
> (Karl Sport development Officer, Yorkshire)

> "We've seen a drop off in numbers. Previously I mentioned we have 500 kids engaged per week. As good as the online offer has been, it's only ever really got up to 150, 200 kids a week, so you're missing 300 young people there that are just not being engaged"
>
> (Claire, Community Sport Club, Greater Manchester)

> "I said video calls, I've done a couple of dance videos...A lot of the ladies especially the older generation with media and Zoom, they don't really use it. Even a phone call was nice just to chat to people and let them know that you're there on the other side of the line. I found out a lot of my clients over 60s actually enjoyed the phone calls as well"
>
> (David, Youth Inclusion Charity, Greater Manchester)

As above, where it is identified that of an original face-to-face offer of 500 children this was reduced to only 150-200 children this digital gap is a key theme of the study. In part, this is delivery challenge of staffing and resourcing such provision. For example you may want one coach delivering live online to small ability groups, as opposed to mass non-tailored sessions. Likewise, it is also likely that in the areas engaged by this study many children just did not have access, especially if parents were using digital devices and they were as a family already navigating financial poverty challenges.

An innovative response to this direct challenge was illustrated by one provider,

> "What we've then done during the COVID journey is really, really take digital forward. We secured a number of different funding pots to launch a tablet loan scheme. We've got several hundred devices loaned out in the community with data SIM cards, with our remote team of digital volunteers providing support to get people online. Then alongside that, we've been, both, linking people into the online offer, including the online physical offer that others are

delivering, but we've also had a number of our classes and activities being delivered digitally online ourselves as well"

(John, Physical Activity for Older People Project, Merseyside)

It is apparent here that this individual and his team acknowledged early on that online footage alone is far from the required 'need' and the a whole host of wider support is needed around such digital sport and physical activity services to enable it to be accessed widely. He went on to say,

> "In terms of our own online delivery, we've had some of our physical activity classes broadcasting online, the care-based exercise, yoga, stuff like that. We've also, actually, managed to run some of our day services remotely online. We've been delivering our cognitive stimulation therapy sort of models online to groups, and they include an element of physical activity. Then a huge amount of it has been around just supporting people to be able to engage socially with others online, be that through a platform that we're hosting, or actually support them to be able to engage with their own friends and families through online platforms"

It is the time, energy and resource to engage and enable socially with online that for him was vital. As we find ourselves in Lockdown 2.0 we must learn this lesson. Strategic organisations in the sport sector must enable and not just provide digital content.

Online presence, role and functionality

Unsurprisingly, the design and repositioning of physical and face-to-face delivery as digital and online formats of activity featured high on the work priorities of many in lockdown and post-lockdown 1.0 with the gradual return to some limited activities.

> "we've been promoting, obviously anybody that has been doing digital platforms for exercise and ourself, we started some chairobics that we'd put up online. Even now we're still getting people applying to keep people active whilst they're still shielding on, still not confident to leave the home"

(Dan, Public Health and Wellbeing Service, Yorkshire)

> "It was relatively straight forward once we got the grip on Zoom. Initially a good take up about 60% then lower as the restrictions went on…[organisation] we continue to engage with our staff and external partners via face-to-face and zoom"

(Alicia, Youth Sport Organisation, Greater Manchester)

As above might suggest the lack of uptake in services and challenges for many of accessing provision that was provided online seemed to hint of multiple key drivers in this area of attempted innovation, For one reason, the notion of digital poverty is vital to highlight. This was not mentioned by all interviewees but one individual presented a very clear picture of digital need in their regional community,

> "One school that we work in in Gorton, Manchester highlighted that 15% of students in year 10 have no access to digital devices and the school applied for support from the DfE laptop scheme. They were concerned that they needed an additional 15 WiFi dongles for this year group that the DfE are not supplying. They have been competing a similar process across year 7 to 9 and believe we need a further 74 laptops and dongles would enable us to equip all current students (we have no way of assessing the need for future Year 7 pupils). Currently, (1 month ago) they have had to produce paper-based work for all students to support the digital divide and ensure all students are given appropriate work to do. In this climate, it is much more

difficult to assess and feedback paper based work, whereas students who are able to access are online materials are also able to receive feedback more quickly and more effectively"

(Alicia, Youth Sport Organisation, Greater Manchester)

"There's been elements of [service users] that not having digital platforms like phones, Wi-Fi, internet, laptops, whatever, it's been an issue"

(Claire, Community Sport Club, Greater Manchester)

Following on from this some in the sport sector acknowledged that community coaches, whilst experts in delivery of coaching were not skilled in the necessary platforms to keep in touch with their participants. Likewise, child protection was also a key issue in this digital landscape due to the highly fluid nature of enabling gymnastics, dance and exercise training across the sporting sector into immediately becoming virtual.

"We did it via Zoom, we gave our staff a lot of training around safeguarding on Zoom, and some of the things that they need to be aware of…[but] coaches are experts in boxing and youth work, but not necessarily experts in IT and Zoom"

(Claire, Community Sport Club, Greater Manchester)

Innovation around social welfare provision

In repositioning the community sport sector, the obvious market movement is to go online, provide digital and virtual platforms for ongoing support in the sport and physical sector. This can maintain and engage participation and bring the long established and understood health and individual development benefits of sport (DCMS, 2015; Sport England, 2016; Sport England, 2020). But where perhaps an unintended policy outcome of the lockdown can be seen is in how many of the leaders, community sector enablers moved towards what might be called a social welfare priority model of delivery. In many cases they actively paused sport for example and redesigned their organisational aims to help contribute towards the community need as part of an emergency response.

In one area this was branded, or classified, as a 'community response',

So that's how they have spent the time, you know, supporting where the need was and what we've called it a community response. Which was nothing to do with sport and activity, it was just about making sure people have what they needed… The other thing is also that we did have a shout-out for volunteers to help out with the community response. Some of those would have been involved during the food parcels and getting the help and support to local neighbours and

residents. Some of them will have utilized that time, but others would have had to shield and wouldn't have been in a position to help....food parcels and medication.

(Craig, Local Authority, Yorkshire)

"One of the approaches that we had in [City A] was to produce an *Active at Home* booklet which was led by Amy Smith who is the national centre program director and oversees {Programme A}. That was produced in [City A] in partnership with Public Health England and Sport England. We distributed that to 25,000 individuals that were shielding. That wouldn't have been… We could have just chosen those postcodes, but again, that was all distributed through local area networks. That proved hugely successful and that model was rolled out nationally as well"

(Sam, Local Government Officer, Yorkshire)

"I know we're very conscious of, as we come out of the current situation, about people being anxious about leaving the house now. We will be looking at how we can ask our volunteers or identify organizations who have befriending schemes"

(Craig, Local Government, Yorkshire)

Due to the nature of some sport projects being in contact with vulnerable groups in the very core activities this gave them a key vantage point into maintaining contact with such COVID vulnerable groups. For example, one public health officer highlighted

"we've been running them since lockdown, but we run like I said the peer support groups, but they're aimed for people with COPD, diabetes, or fibromyalgia. For them, we have been keeping in touch online. I think as well, even for them, especially diabetes and COPD, it's a confusing time, because they know they're more vulnerable to catching COVID, but it's them making sure that they know that there is a platform for them to keep in touch with others with the same condition. They can communicate with each other. They can ask each other how they feel, how they've been and they know about the person that they're going to answer that question to understand because they've got the same condition. I think for people like that, that's what we've been attempting to do, but again, it's a struggle to get the word out there sometimes"

(Dan, Public Health and Wellbeing Service, Yorkshire)

In the very simplest sense such community responses acting as a partnership between public and voluntary sectors offered a key service in times of need way beyond sport.

"just through talking to people who've been helping out with food parcels and things like that. People have been getting weekly phone calls, and are saying, "I need to see people. I want to see people's faces and have that interaction personally."

(Karl Sport development Officer, Yorkshire)

The scale of this social welfare role of agencies working in sport is also captured nicely in the following observation,

"COVID has really put forward and showcased the range of what we do. I think particularly in terms of stepping forward as the main front line response locally, everybody has probably had some level of engagement with some aspect of what we've delivered in this borough because we've had over 150,000 interventions in our last six months"

(John, Physical Activity for Older People Project, Merseyside)

Essentially if reframed as a mental and physical health service delivered and co-produced by volunteer, charity and public sector organisations John suggests he has had 150,000 points of contact across this workforce in Merseyside over the 6 month period of the study. This level of engagement and outreach is fundamental to the delivery of sport and physical activity. But it is far more than this, and the social, individual, psychological and community 'net worth' of this is vast. Whilst its size will always remain contested, the role, value and significance to users of this often hidden social welfare service is long established. In the context of COVID-19 the willingness to shift from, say physical activity service delivery to welfare support and mental health befrienders, medication and food parcel deliverers shows the essence of a sector that has its roots in community networks of trust, support and individual kindness.

Third sector relationship and co-production

Alongside broad movement by some sport organisations into direct and indirect welfare provision, a further core theme of the repositioning aspect of this model is the vital co-production of sport delivery in England through the voluntary sector. Time after time they were recognised as the community 'assets' that could communicate and build relationships. Higher level organisations in public health, active partnerships, local government and even charities with wider remits across cities saw this mesh of loosely connected individuals, coaches, parents and participants in clubs and third sector agencies as the essence of what they relied upon. For example,

> "the packs and everything are being put together by an organization called Community 'A' Youth Alliance. They are an independent organization, well say independent, they are funded through the council but they are an independent organization who then links in with the voluntary community sector of young people. They are the ones who have the connections and give the support out to those organizations"
>
> (Karl Sport development Officer, Yorkshire)

> "I think the biggest thing for us, it was something that we were exploring and doing pre-lockdown is the-- we're starting to commission physical activity projects to the voluntary sector. It's probably just accelerated our thought process around that. Some of the funding from Sport England and the central government has enabled us to do that. Giving money for these voluntary sectors to design the interventions that work for them. I think, again, that's reinforced what I've known for a number of years that that's the right approach"
>
> (Sam, Local Government Officer, Yorkshire)

In one region a specific collective of public agencies across local government and public health highlighted how their long established Asset-based Community Development (ABCD) (Bates and Hylton, 2020) had offered a powerful co-production network to fall back on in this community emergency. In many ways it is a more modern well-established evolution of historic sport development approaches where local government had the resources to service working groups of sports clubs, thematic targeted groups (inclusion, disability, youth sport, women and girls) from a 'bottom-up' as a opposed to 'top-down' policy approach. It could be argued that in more recent years with much talk of strategic approaches to sport development, digital delivery, research and insight-led policy that grass roots ABCD style approaches have lapsed. Perhaps in part due to austerity-led cuts (Mackintosh, 2020, forthcoming; Mori, et al, 2020; King et al, 2015; Widdop et al, 2019) and to a very market-led approach to delivery that had emerged in the last ten years.

In contrast to this the commissioning approach is another synergy with ABCD that together has provided powerful vehicles for community-needs local sport and physical services that meet the

requirements of targeted populations. Two examples of this approach and the benefits during COVID-19 can be seen below,

> "Then in the last week, we've commissioned a department for transport, sustainable travel project out via the voluntary sector. We've had nine organizations come forward for that, for them to deliver-- It's a walking and employability project, but we've got some flexibility in that funding for it to be very much around sustainable travel. They're all doing socially distanced walks with a very strong theme around accessing those people that have been shielding that haven't had access to anything. I think it's stuff that we've already known about around asset-based community development and everyone building from the bottom up and having those conversations"
>
> (Sam, Local Government Officer, Yorkshire)

> I'm based in the south where basically we go in and we try to work with local assets. We're working at ABCD, in full, Asset Based Community Development. Basically, we're looking at things from bottom-up rather than top-down. It's what the community says that they want and need, we deliver. Obviously, with it being part of the LDP and then part of our role is to get people active. Again, it's linking up with local GPs, community organizations, charities, et cetera, to try and engage people in physical activity to reduce-- Also, we're trying to reduce health inequalities as well.
>
> (Dan, Public Health and Wellbeing Service, Yorkshire)

Repositioning is a vital trend to understand over the period of COVID-19 lockdown 1.0 and lockdown 2.0. The second period is beyond the scope of this stage of the study. But, what is apparent is that learning lessons from design, delivery and digital platforms is as much about relationships with communities as it is about the actual process of redesign. Facilitation of innovation and enterprise is a key function of making the sector ready to navigate the next challenges it faces. This said, the digital divide and inability to engage with sections of society needs to be emphasised. Furthermore, the benefits of ABCD-led approaches to regional sport systems overseen by Active Partnerships are also clear. This relies on knowing your stakeholders, not assuming the assets they have and then being capable of communicating in multiple forms across different cultures, languages and with a shared local understanding.

Reorganisation

Furlough and organisational restructure

Furlough and reorganisation of work structures and systems was a theme present for some of the organisations we spoke to. For some this was a mix of redeployment and Furlough. In the case of the Boyne (2004) model this helped us make sense of the two strands of activity as redeployment was seen as a more short term economic saving and efficiency gain or adaption. Furlough due to it being 80% wage and for up to 6 months we saw this as a restructuring approach as it had potential longer term implications. For example, some organisations may Furlough staff, use the government income to support their wages and the organisation being fiscally viable. But, in the medium term jobs may be lost or redundancies invoked. As an early phase aspect of our ongoing study of COVID-19 at this stage we focused on experiences of reorganisation.

> "Yes, the staff have been furloughed but they've also been redeployed and they've been all helping with the community response. Either answering telephones and responding to people's

needs or because of the summer holiday activities, obviously, none of that's happened, it's all been happening virtually. One of the centres have put a pack of physical activities stuff together. A number of different staff including ours were out delivering those to farmers that are identified by the schools. Same as some food crafts, some food activity packs, and some craft ones. On a weekly basis we've been giving those out, the staff have been deployed to get those out to the families"

(Karl Sport development Officer, Yorkshire)

This was located within a wider organisational culture of constant change for Karl which is typical of the constant changes in funding cycles for non-statutory sport provision (King et al, 2015; Thompson, Bloyce and Mackintosh, 2020; Widdop et al, 2019),

"There are about four full-time equivalent now. We used to be a team of about 35 but not anymore…I think we're down to the bare minimum now. So I'm hoping that it will be on the way up rather than any further decline. They're looking at a new sports facility strategy, that will probably influence the work they do going forward. With being from a service, there's a recreational service and then we gave our ledger services out to a trust, community trust. The development aspect of it has moved ...we're not very settled at the moment, but hopefully going forward.

Other organisations explained how Furlough was about longevity and survival management tactics. But this diversity of responses also shows how it had differential impacts on coaches, full time employees and thus community sport dependent upon how it was implemented,

"Doing everything within our control to ensure the longevity of the organisation, we have made the very difficult decision to furlough 3 members [later extended to 4] of our core team and take advantage of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. We have also suspended all 7 of our zero hours contracted coaching staff and have directed them towards the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme, employees, which includes one apprentice were furloughed"

(Alicia, Youth Sport Organisation, Greater Manchester)

"to start with, the furlough stuff wasn't available, so me and the full-time staff worked really hard...Then some of the furlough scheme came along…Amy and Sam were furloughed. It was up to me and Gavin to maintain that. We furloughed all of our coaches apart from two. They were the coaches that delivered boxing and dance, they stayed on and they delivered them sessions...There was a lot of change"

(David, Youth Inclusion Charity, Greater Manchester)

"in terms of what we delivered, everything we delivered stopped. All staff members did all our engagement were furloughed bar two senior managers, who obviously a senior manager's there before they can continue. In terms of our delivery, we completely stopped as an organization"

(Mark, Community Sport Organisation, Merseyside)

Furlough and reorganisation also should not be understood as a transactional relationship between Government, employer and owners or senior managers within industry. For John, he also acknowledged the local community itself as a powerful vehicle for ensuring survival whether that was continued engagement or wider funding support,

"Ultimately, we did furlough 13 of 150 staff and they were staff who actually came and asked could they be furloughed because it was better for them given their family situations and their caring responsibilities. We were absolutely fine to support that, but there were no compulsory furloughs. We went into it in a very conscious way, but also fully understanding that we'd do

everything that we could to then mitigate against the lost income. It's only the fact that a number of funders and the local system recognized the value in what we're doing and wanted to actually, therefore, safeguard our sustainability through it, that we've got to where we are and we're not out of the woods yet, but the organization's not going to go under if you know what I mean?

(John, Physical Activity for Older People Project, Merseyside)

Physical infrastructure: Reorganisation and challenge

Reorganisation in the Boyne (2004) model as applied in various economic downturns also had a distinct public health aspect in this pandemic evolution amongst community sport organisations. For example it was outlined that,

> "It's quite a new facility anyway, but we bought things like touchless soap dispensers, peddle activated hand sanitizers, door stoppers. We've done a touchless program now, so all our doors are now open. Nobody has to push this knob, just tried to look at how we can reduce transmission"
>
> (Julie, Community Sport Organisation, Cheshire)

The physical change at one gymnastics club was considerable in terms of the experience for parents, coaches and participants. This was suggested to be represented by,

> "the biggest change for us is this open, transparent viewing area that we've always had. That was brilliant. Everyone would come in with the cups of tea and coffee, they put themselves down, all the children are in there, and we've built a fantastic community really. We loved it because when we have the children over, we've got that face to face, we can feed back to the parents on the spot. We've really enjoyed that side of the club, even though we have to tell them to just tone it down a little, their volume and our volume. That's been the only thing, but we've always loved it. Now, we haven't got that. We drop off and they pick up. We've not got the adults in the gym"
>
> (Julie, Community Sport Organisation, Cheshire)

This same research participant went on to outline how restrictive physical space use is. The regimented nature of life in community sport is illustrated by how she argues,

> "Now you can't do anything unless you're a member because you can't access anything, they won't let you in, it's track and trace. It's actually in many ways the processes and the protocols have done us a favour, and we'll stick with it going forward".

Shifts in routines, priorities and workload

Change and organisational priorities and how these are reflected in new restructuring processes also form a vital theme to help understand day-to-day life in post-lockdown life during the global pandemic for community sport. Examples of this include,

> "I guess everybody's had to change the way that they work and their own routines. Like I work full time, I've got two children. I have been working from home with two kids I've been trying to homeschool. My husband is the same, obviously, he's involved in the club, so our priorities have shifted a little bit. The free time that we have available is more restricted now. It's been quite hard to maintain what we would have done normally".
>
> (George, Disability Sport Community Organisation, Cheshire)

He went on to also highlight the relationship with NGBs and the gatekeeper role they play around their working practices.

> "We've been quite restricted by what we can do by our governing body. Special Olympics GB has basically said, "You're not allowed to do any activity until we tell you, you can." They've now put out some guidelines around certain activities can start from the 5th of October, but there's a lot of stuff that we need to get ready, risk assessments, put COVID officers in place.

> That's a lot for people who have been working full time and to be able to pay money to get back off the ground, I guess, in light of we're all having to deal with similar things in our working lives as well.

Social activities form a central feature of sport in communities that provide the often cited 'glue' that build bonds between club members, participants, coaches, volunteers and referees. For one Cheshire-based community club they summed up numerous other organisations views in their perspective,

> "Unfortunately, functions were out of the question but that's fine, we'll just close off that section and we'll go. That's the way we've looked at it and that's the way of looking at it going forward and it's actually changed the way that the club is operating because we're all working together and we're all now working as one section in the positive way"
>
> (Liz, Community Sport Organisation, Cheshire)

Notwithstanding some of the micro changes within and between community organisation for safety, public health and operational reasons this illustrates the considerable disruption to daily life for community sport. What remains unclear is the long term impacts of this on volunteer commitment, coaching recruitment, development and sport organisation's will to return to normal services post-pandemic.

Communication method redesign and innovation

Considerable energy was spent over the six month period after March 17th 2020 in reshaping how organisations, their participants, members, coaches and volunteers communicated. It is also clear that a light has been shone on how modern mediums of human communication are implemented to variable quality. This forms part of the cross-cutting theme of digital divide within community sport. For example,

> "I think our communications internally and externally, could improve. It has highlighted things like that. We probably spend too much time on a website, which I don't think a lot of people, but that's how sporting organizations really operate these days. It is social media, what's on tonight, what's on next? It's not who's the best…ourselves as officers it's not our first thought to do social media, a certain age. Maybe if younger members came in they would tweak things and send stuff much more than we would... that definitely needs to be addressed"
>
> (Karl Sport development Officer, Yorkshire)

> "we've always had a WhatsApp group. We have every child, their parents' contact details. We convey information via WhatsApp. We always have done since WhatsApp was more readily available. We have a parents' group but we just text out…We used the WhatsApp group a lot. If ever anybody's struggling, they do tend to put it out there and straight away, that gets looked at. There was a lad struggling the other week and two lads went around to his house to check if he was all right"
>
> (Alan, Community Youth Football Organisation, Lancashire)

> "We have a Microsoft Teams meeting every single morning, at ten o'clock until eleven. That's whether we need the whole hour or we just need to share an issue that we can all support each other with. To be honest, at the beginning, it was different working from home. Then just getting on with the work. Then it was like, "Oh, this is just great, we're not getting interrupted. I can actually get more work done," to other people saying, "I've missed the team. I like to bounce off ideas off you throughout the day," and that's taken away"

(Susan, Community Sport Enterprise, Merseyside)

A complex national communication issue is how the policy from government and other agencies such as NGBs and Sport England is fed into community sport. The availability of such information being one thing, but perhaps more crucial aspect is the interpretation and re-interpretation.

> "I think the biggest challenge we'll have is I think that, as much as the voluntary sector with support from ourselves, will look at putting provision on, I think the biggest challenge will be, and again, this is coming from conversations with the partners, that then convincing local residents that it's safe to do so. I'm guessing the information that people may have will be national media sources or social media. Then it can be quite a complex load of information to navigate through"
>
> (Sam, Local Government Officer, Yorkshire)

Sam then goes on to argue how,

> "there's the central-local authority approach, a lot of that has been around public health messaging of COVID and how to stop it and wash your hands and social distance and a lot of that. We have used social media from a [Programme A] standpoint, as much as [Programme A] is a strategy, we have a bit of a virtual team that operates underneath that.

Awareness of the most local micro communication of those in need was often driven by personal relationships. Most illuminating is the view presented by one youth inclusion sport charity. Here he stated,

> " [laughs] I had to ring them. I don't even text them because some of the don't even pick up the text. I ring the ones that don't pick up texts. I text the ones that pick up texts. The ones that have got me on Facebook or social media, I can easily do a WhatsApp chat or a Zoom because obviously WhatsApp on the phone's been ideal. They've even got a tablet that they actually. Yes, he doesn't pick up texts. He's set in his ways, but I will actually email him and let him know the gym's open. I think I communicate with them all in the way that suits them. That's what I've learnt since lockdown"
>
> (David, Youth Inclusion Charity, Greater Manchester).

This section of the report has highlighted the impacts of the pandemic on organisations in the community sport section built around the three key themes of *retrenchment, repositioning* and wholesale *restructuring*. The data and evidence used in this section builds a case for gaining greater clarity on what is a highly nuanced and complex set of management practices and decisions around a worldwide public health challenge. It also shows that highly localised reactions, differing approaches and varied level of accessibility to support make for a patchwork quilt of provision across areas. Recommendations around these themes will be integrated alongside the findings from the next section that explores individual experiences of the pandemic in the five Active Partnership communities that were the focus of the study.

SECTION 6: Individual sport, physical activity and exercise participation – the impact of COVID-19 in England

This section gives an insight into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in England upon communities in areas of socio-economic deprivation. It draws upon the COM-B model (The Capability, Opportunity, Motivation, Behaviour: COM-B) to facilitate our understanding and interpretations of the individuals' qualitative insights provided here regarding their sport and physical activity engagement during the pandemic. COM-B posits behaviour as the result of an interaction between three components: capability, opportunity, and motivation (see Figure 19). Capability can be psychological (knowledge) or physical (skills); opportunity can be social (societal influences) or physical (environmental resources); motivation can be automatic (emotion) or reflective (beliefs, intentions).

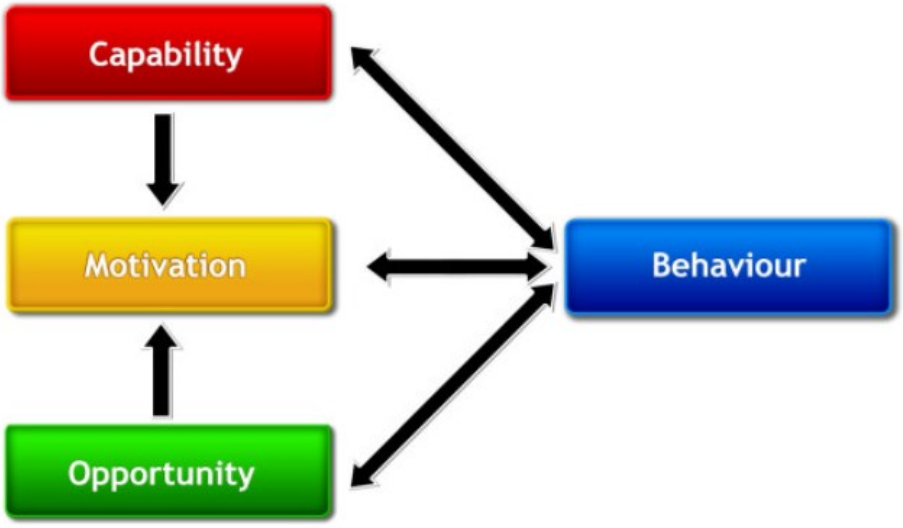


Figure 19: The COM-B system - a framework for understanding behaviour [Source: Michie, S., van Stralen, M. and West, R. (2011)]

This model has been effectively applied to many health behaviours at both individual and organisational levels (Barker, Atkins & de Luisignan, 2016, Jackson, Eliasson, Barber & Weinman, 2014, McDonagh et al., 2017). For the 20 participants here, barriers and enablers/facilitators were interacting rather than disconnected factors. It was clear that the COVID-19 restrictions had the greatest impact on individual's physical and social opportunities alongside their automatic and reflective motivations to engage and sustain sport and physical activity participation. It was clear for participants who lived in areas where they had easy access to environments supportive of outdoor exercise e.g. cycle paths, walking paths, large green spaces and attractive scenery that this enabled them in being active. Participants highlighted the reduction in traffic enhanced their enjoyment and thus motivation for outdoor activity. Having indoor and outdoor space at home was also important for participants who were able to be physically active during this time (e.g. through allowing them to adapt home space for exercising). Thus for participants with limited space and/or access to safe, attractive local spaces for outdoor activity we need to create opportunities to support and overcome this barrier. Social opportunity was also voiced as key to participants engagement in sport and physical activity during this time as individuals used social connections with family, friends and local groups they were involved in to motivate and facilitate opportunities to be active e.g. bike rides with friends, zoom classes, socially distanced small group classes.

Social distancing restrictions led to feelings of social isolation for some individuals which had a knock on negative impact on their motivations to be active. Reflective motivations were also impacted by

individual's fears and anxieties around contracting and/or transmitting the virus to more vulnerable members of their family making them apprehensive to return to group-based activity. Some individuals did use fitness-based apps to drive their automatic motivation through setting goals, logging progress and competing with others to reinforce their physical activity behaviour, which sustained their motivation during this time.

The qualitative insights here emphasise it is key to create physical and social opportunities to motivate active lifestyles. Providing safe supportive local infrastructure and local support networks will facilitate individuals to be active during these times. Therefore working closely with individuals and local community organisations is vital to allow targeted alternative activities to be offered that are within government guidelines and acceptable to community's needs.

COVID-19: Participant experiences

Benefits of regular participation in sport and physical activity in COVID-19

Those participants in our sample who engaged in regular sport and physical activity during COVID-19 reported many health and wellbeing benefits:

> "Really confident and happy because it gets your dopamine levels up doesn't it... just makes you feel really strong and on top of the world... and by consistently going we noticed the changes... it just made you feel really confident and happy. [...] It's kind of a way to do something to get your mood up and feel a lot better about yourself... it releases all the stress. It gets you feeling happy"
>
> (Emma, Lancashire).

> "It keeps me fit as I say, and it also helps me sleep well, I've noticed that definitely. I think because once you do an 8-mile walk, you get some fresh air, you do sleep better I've found"
>
> (Anne, Merseyside).

> "Actually, coming together as a family to do a family sport, we've never really done that before. Yes, we've been to the park and had a kick about, gone for a bike ride, but we actually brought sport into what we were doing at home because we're all good at it. We've definitely kept up with that, and that's been something new for us. It gave us some together time because we are a busy family. Also, encouraging others in our extended family to join us in sporting activities. Socially distanced, we did lots of walks through the summer and trails and treks which normally we wouldn't have done"
>
> (Susan, Greater Manchester).

Given the level of evidence to support that physical activities leads to health benefits we have not overly focused on these outcomes given the scale of other insights the data offered. We consider it more important for example to identify those communities that perhaps are not aware of such benefits or where there are limitations in facilitating and enabling the benefits.

Consequences of limited participation in sport and physical activity in COVID-19

Social implications

A main form of social interaction for the participants was sport and physical activity. COVID-19 took away these opportunities and left the participants feeling lost:

> "All hockey got cancelled, all tag rugby got cancelled. Any of my team sports were out of the bag, so I couldn't socialize with any of them anymore, couldn't play the sport anymore. That had a detrimental effect massively because not only were you not seeing people face to face, and just having that nice positive experience of being social, but the sport element to it as well was completely gone, so that had a huge impact. We weren't even allowed to go for a walk together at one point. As someone who lives on their own and is very isolated, when that's taken away from them, it then reinforced the fact that it's not just the activity itself, it is the social"
>
> (Katie, Greater Manchester).

Equally, while there were other opportunities available to the participants, some felt that they did not act as an effective substitute and therefore they often became socially isolated:

> "I'm not going to say I was negative about working out from home, but when you keep fit, you look forward to being around others, socializing, communicating, building off other people's energy. We didn't have any of that and there was no way to get that. None of that was provided. Yes, we all worked from Zoom and we did the best with what we could, but it's never the same as what you get when you go out to have an activity. I think the thought of not returning didn't motivate me to keep on being fit because it was that mindset of, "Well, I'll deal with it when it's time to return." We don't know when that's going to be […] I couldn't wait to get back actually into just physical activity and being with other people because I wanted to return to sport, I wanted my healthy mindset back, I wanted my positive outlook back. Also, just to see other people's faces enjoying the same sports that I do. You just get a lot from it, you feel a lot better"
>
> (Susan, Manchester).

> "I was talking to a really good friend of mine yesterday, and we've really not been in touch very much with each other over the last six months. I said this and he agreed about him as well, I said that I've just got a bit lazy about keeping in touch with people, got quite settled in some ways into being at home and having a new routine that is bounded by our immediate family and the four walls here […] my going outside of those boundaries and making an effort to keep in touch with friends has definitely fallen away quite a lot. I've got a bit more lazy about doing that"
>
> (Paul, Manchester).

Further to this, the lack of opportunity to engage in regular sport and physical activity had negative implications for their social skills, as Dan explained:

> "Well, it's not just I don't think it was just about playing badminton, but all the things around the social stuff as well. […] I have had to do a lot to work back my social confidence since badminton was taken away and relearn a bit how to talk to people and how to communicate, I mean, interact with people. […] I've noticed that I'm not as sharp as I was before. Like, I used to be really quick on jokes and comebacks and that kind of stuff. But now it's more like I have to really think it through and I have to be a lot more conscious of what I say because I'm not as sharp on how I how I would talk to specific person and I just have to relearn how to talk to that person for example"
>
> (Dan, Merseyside).

Physical wellbeing

Unsurprisingly, the lack of engagement in sport and physical activity had direct implications physical health of our participants, with many reporting loss of strength and stamina and increases in weight. Interestingly, this lack of engagement in sport and physical activity had negative connotations for other healthy lifestyle choices, including diet and alcohol consumption. The participants appeared to be less motivated to make healthy lifestyle choices when they were no longer doing sport and physical activity:

> "To be honest with you, during lockdown we just tended to eat what we wanted to eat because everything was so crap anyway that you just thought that the last thing that I'm going to do is start worrying about dieting and stuff. Yes, I think the harm that it's done is that kind of thing. What's the term, lockdown pounds?"
>
> (David, Yorkshire).

> "I've always played football. I've always been part of a team type of things. Then, obviously, with this happening, they just told you, you were sat in your house and you aren't doing nothing […] it went to non-existent, and doing nothing, everything being shut down […] from turning in for having loads of sessions to having nothing […] It's affected it massively because you've just been sat around doing anything, and then that becomes, you start drinking like but not being able, you now actually can't do nothing […] it's how much you're only allowed to do. You're getting an hour of it, an hour and a half on a Saturday. You're not allowed to do anything else. Going from doing probably what? 20, 30 hours of it a week of football, I'm doing now what? An hour. Your physical activities are going to non-existent ... I've put weight on ... you're not being able to do anything"
>
> (Andy, Lancashire).

The notion of 'Lockdown pounds' as a construct of the mental and physical processes contributing towards weight gain clearly for many was very real. This also corroborates organisational employee reflections on the period where a number of youth organisations in particular commented on observing weight gain in their participants through online media such as Zoom and FaceTime meetings.

Mental wellbeing

The physical and social implications of non-participation in sport and physical activity had some quite severe negative implications for the mental wellbeing of some of our participants. They explained how they had reduced self-esteem, loss of identity and increased anxiety:

> "My life is 100% sport and that comes in me personally, and my family. I just felt like everything have been taken away abruptly, everything I'm passionate about, I felt had disappeared […] "If I didn't have a sport, what do I have that's personal to me?" Obviously, I have my family and my children, but we're still entitled to have something that's your own identity […] Yes, it's who I am. It was just almost like it was gone and it was lost, and it didn't mean anything, so I had to find ways to reinvent myself […] self-esteem was low during the middle of the lockdown, due to not being as active as I normally am […] it's my identity. It's who I am, and I've never lost that before. To really have that lockdown time to reflect, this is why it's important. It's not just because I want to keep fit, it's because it's just a part of my makeup, it's just who I am, it's how I let off a bit of steam, it's how I enjoy my time socially"
>
> (Susan, Greater Manchester).

> "Well, sometimes you feel a bit down […] Yes, because you become lazy, because you know you can't physically go and do much. There's nothing open. You can't do them, so you're actually becoming lazy. You're doing nothing, you're slouching about, you're not getting dressed in the morning, you don't have a thing and then it all becomes into the catch-22 type of thing. It just and then you start dragging yourself down"
>
> (George, Lancashire).

> "I thought it could be a year before any of this happens again. I was quite anxious... I started going inside myself a little bit... It wasn't good because I'm used to structure and I built my week around the sessions […] it really threw me off balance and things and I could feel myself I wasn't sleeping , my anxiety came back"
>
> (Adam, Lancashire).

> "I find it difficult to pin it down to something. There's definitely been changes in my wellbeing […] I've definitely got a bit more short-tempered, I would say. We have a really good relationship in our household, I think. We've been quite open in talking about this, that we've

been a bit more snappy, and a bit more narky with each other's over the last six months. We've talked about it last night briefly as well. We're recognizing that and trying to make an effort around that, particularly as we feel it has an impact on our son and things he might be picking up about the way that people should relate to one another"

(Paul, Greater Manchester).

When delving deeper into this issue, some of the participants revealed how this situation manifested from the fact that sport and physical activity acting as a coping mechanism to protect and advance their mental wellbeing:

"Your mental health as well, especially […] I think from the mental health perspective during COVID-19 when you live on your own, and you're reliant on mixing with friends, it's largely, in a sporting social situation, it does create negative thoughts because I suppose you start questioning your element of loneliness. If you keep busy all the time playing sport, meeting people, having a full jam-packed diary, I suppose it brings to the forefront suddenly, when you are on your own for a large period of time, and you're only allowed outside for an hour, and you don't have a garden or anything like that, it suddenly highlights a lot of mental health challenges which you maybe use physical activity and sport as a coping mechanism to have positive mental health for. When that coping mechanism is taken away from you it then becomes even more challenging to find new things to do, to take up your time to put up with that […] Because you've lost your fitness, you've lost that social, your job's been put on furlough, a combination of a multiple of things means that you are lower - so probably got lower self-esteem, lower confidence […] That loneliness and isolation Whilst I'm a positive person, I like to think there was very few days where I'd let it get to me. I was still acutely aware all the time that it was an isolating environment […] At the beginning when it was full lockdown, a couple of people maybe had a few snacks. Probably ate the things that I shouldn't have eaten. Just probably as a coping mechanism, so in a reaction to a stressful environment. That made me feel less positive about myself. I didn't feel like I was looking after myself, doing less physical activity, not socializing, not eating the right things, and then that ultimately leads you to have a less positive sense of self […] I'd say at the start, a negative impact on self and self-worth, efficacy, confidence"

(Katie, Greater Manchester).

Katie clearly represents a number of the individual participants in this study, but also supports the scale of mental health challenge facing community sport providers in the earlier section of this report. Broad societal uncertainty, fear and anxiety alongside instability in working routines also contribute towards potential latent issues in mental health challenges as we hope to move out of this period of global pandemic emergency. It is beyond the scope of this study to quantify this, but the numeric data present in this research illustrate local shifts in attendees, numbers of coaches employed, referees engaged and parents present as community spectators. Sadly, the impact of this seismic level of change in infrastructure and physical activity patterns remains a sizeable unknown which Sport England and all agencies that support sport and physical activity must prepare for.

Barriers and enablers to sport and physical activity participation in COVID-19

Because of the significant physical, social, and mental wellbeing implications associated with (non)participation in sport and physical activity, we wanted to understand what factors enabled and/or prevented our participants from engaging in sport and physical activity during COVID-19.

Enabling factors

Environment

A significant factor that encouraged some of our sample to being active during COVID-19 was the environment. Specifically, the participants spoke about the importance of their geographical location in terms of having easy access to countryside, local walks, cycle paths, and tow paths:

> "Most definitely where we live, we're very fortunate because from most directions I can be in greenspace and be in countryside within less than 10 minutes, if you like. It is easy. Our location is easier, we're not high-rise housing. We've got plenty of greenspace and we've got open countryside very near to most people. We've got tow paths, we've got riversides, walks, we've got woodlands. They are publicly accessible. You can do nice local walks from where we are. We're quite fortunate in that respect. It's not a rural community, but it's like a small post-mining area. Yes, we're fortunate in that respect"
>
> (David, Yorkshire).

> "During lockdown, I went back to my parents and it is right by the river Mersey and it was, I had a really well-established route that I knew well; a really nice route. It was usually quite quiet and so that was nice. Here, there is the Thames path, which is about which is maybe a kilometre south of here. And once you reach that, you can go for a reasonably nice jog along the Thames. But besides that, this is very, very urban area. And so, I do have some running routes, but you have to really squeeze the area to find a good running route"
>
> (Chris, Merseyside).

Participants felt that the reduction in traffic on the roads made it more enjoyable and therefore they felt greater motivation to participate in outdoor exercise:

> "I got a little bike and started doing little journeys on a bike locally whilst the traffic was quieter. The roads being quieter definitely meant it was easier. I am still part of that population who is a bit wary sometimes and isn't as confident as we could be. […] Having the opportunity to get more confident in a quieter environment, to then follow that through to now was fantastic. It was actually, I'd go as far as saying, it was a joy to cycle on the roads whereas usually, it becomes of a task rather than a pleasure"
>
> (Katie, Greater Manchester).

In addition to the environmental infrastructure (e.g., countryside, local parks, and footpaths), personal home environment space was regularly cited as an important enabling factor to being active. For example, participants who had space both indoors and outdoors were able to adapt this to create a supportive space to be active in,

> "My children are embarrassed to exercise in front of each other because their strengths are completely different. I'm like, "Right. Let's do this gazebo and let's put it there." It felt better. They felt better outside, so they could have that privacy on their own. […] The neighbours are not looking, but at the same time there's an extension for the treadmill. I have the weights, I have skipping rope, and my daughters wear hijabs. Inside the tent, they will feel that they can take the hijab off. Wear whatever you want to do to sort it out. Have space in my house so we could have guests in and no one will know"
>
> (Isla, Yorkshire).

> "Because I've got enough home gym equipment to be able to see myself through from a physical perspective. […] Recently purchased a bike and put it on a turbo trainer that I've borrowed off a friend just this week and now, I'm setup to do that cardio, but in an indoor environment. Already I've been on it this morning for the first time. It's just nice to be active. Fortunately, I have a big window, I have a big space, so even though you're inside, and it is the same four walls, you do feel like you're closer to the outside. It's inspired me. I wouldn't have bought that if it wasn't for COVID-19, I don't think"
>
> (Katie, Greater Manchester).

Adapting and finding new routines

Alongside the institutional adaption theme in the organisational interview data individual respondents also noted a multitude of alternative uses of space and place. Due to social distancing restrictions preventing engagement in more traditional sport opportunities, some participants found enjoyment in alternative forms of exercise. Importantly, the participants stressed that they would not have engaged in these alternative modes if we had not found ourselves in a pandemic. In this sense, COVID-19 acted as a catalyst for exploring alternative forms of physical activity, forms that they enjoyed and have continued to engage in:

> "Because obviously, I couldn't play the odd game of squash or badminton. I continued running and what I also started at the beginning of COVID-19, was walking. My husband and I can walk between 10 and 15 miles a day. We've actually got Fitbits. Over two weeks, we actually walked 150 miles, we clocked it on our Fitbit. Walking is something I've started during the start of COVID-19 and I still do it now obviously because the leisure centres are closed, there's no cricket during the summer. Walking has been a big part of it during COVID-19 and also I have continued running as well. [...] Because, as I say, the leisure centres were closed and I'm used to doing a lot of sport really, so although I was still running, there was a little gap in my life I suppose. Walking is absolutely wonderful, I've really come to enjoy it. There's loads of walks around here"
>
> (Anne, Merseyside).

> "And then the other thing I took up over the lockdown was cycling, in particular, to and from the sessions with Charles, which was about an hour's cycle from where I lived to the session. So, two-hour cycle in total, and that was really good for me. And I stuck with the cycling. And actually, I'm planning to cycle Land's End to John o' Groats next summer, which I might not have taken up cycling that seriously, had lockdown not happened. So, if you mean that's, if you like an enabler, one of few enabling things that, that COVID-19 has had, if you like, on sport, is that I probably wouldn't have taken up cycling so seriously"
>
> (Chris, Merseyside).

A lot of these environment changes and physical infrastructure adaptions also reflect the places people live. This supports the wider Sport England (2020) move towards designing in physical activity to community spaces and environments. As the Sport England new strategy is in development alongside the consultation document (Sport England, 2020), a DCMS Select Committee Inquiry (2020) and House of Lords Inquiry into a National Plan for Sport and Recreation (2020) this needs to position these qualitative views to enable a post-COVID-19 recovery. As Sweden has already identified a recovery 'exit pathway' needs to be more than just guidelines and strategy.

Physical motivation

Another key enabler for some of our sample was the use of technology. First, the participants explained how fitness Apps, such as Fitbit and Strava, to design, measure, and evaluate their fitness goals, routines, and improvements. These individuals strongly argued that these fitness Apps acted as an important form of motivation to continue to engage with alternative forms of activity during the pandemic:

> In the beginning, I had downloaded premium accounts for my Fitbit, kept a tally. Monitored how much water I was drinking, how many steps. Normally, I'd do between 25,000 and 35,000 steps a day, and then once I was at home I was, "Oh my gosh, you're only doing 1,000. This isn't okay," so I tried to motivate myself to keep going, set myself personal targets […] Fitbit

was 100%, for the first half of lockdown, I'm going to say my saviour because I could tap into short exercises in and around working with the children and working from home, which was good

(Susan, Greater Manchester).

I got Strava quite recently, but I did have it on, I think it was Apple Health, like the app on my phone, I'm not too sure. I would record my distance, and time, and that thing, just for interest really. It started off as something just for the pure enjoyment, but now I'm making it something more motivational. I'm dedicated to getting faster and getting better. Does that make sense? It is nice to see my pace go down, and distance increase, [...] but also the idea of having goals myself, because obviously I had done very little sport before, and I was probably very unfit now that I think about it. I think the idea of seeing an improvement as well, like in my running, my fitness levels, and I could only do one lap, and then I got faster, and I could do it without stopping, [...]. I think it was quite nice to see an improvement, like a definite improvement

(Hannah, Merseyside).

Fitbit a motivation as well to walk, it quite addictive to see the steps going up and that you're doing more than the recommended daily dose of exercise. [...] I always check it each morning for the previous day just to see how I've done. Whether I need to up it a bit because I've gone a bit low yesterday on the step count. That is a big part of my motivation to continue walking or do another couple of runs. [...] that is a definite motivation, yes, it's brilliant, yes, absolutely

(Anne, Merseyside).

The coach to 5k was really motivation and useful to get off the ground. That was vital, really, because I wouldn't know how to structure a fitness plan without that

(Oscar, Merseyside).

However, it is worth reflecting back on some of the earlier findings in the report that highlighted a digital divide for local populations. Thus, it is the assertion of this study that some individuals, from quite different communities were not using Fitbits, Strava, Apple Health and other wearable technologies as they did not have accessible android mobile phones, tablets or laptops. There is clearly a growing information communication divide and it is vital to not rely upon engagement and marketing in this format alone.

That is unless we wish to only bring into sport participation those that already take part, have club memberships and enjoy the privilege of being part of community sport. We should not forget that privilege is inbuilt into our sport system, if transport, joining fees and equipment were the ‘old money’ luxuries of participation, then maybe digital technology is the latest platform of exclusion. It is just that perhaps until now much of this has been hidden from sport.

While some participants found online virtual environments to be an ineffective alternative to face-to-face sport and exercise, some participants in our sample did suggest that the provision of online virtual exercise and activity classes were something that helped them to remain active while COVID-19 restrictions were in place:

> "The other thing I did, which I never would've done before, was a virtual class. A friend of mine put me in touch with a class that she does. It was a member of a studio down in London. I would never have had that opportunity to do a class with her and it's quite a unique class. It's not one that they do around here. Without COVID-19, I probably never would have been nudged towards it, and I never would have had the opportunity to do a class because she would've been doing them in person, not online"
>
> (Susan, Manchester).

> "We do a lot of zoom activities now through Active ****[…] That's made a big difference. I think that's made a big difference because if this didn't happen then the zoom wouldn't have come out and we wouldn't have really started using this technology. This works really well with some aspects... got to adapt unfortunately... if we didn't have that then the activities are normally outside. I have to travel on the bus which I won't be able to do at the moment"
>
> (Male, Active Partnership Region, North of England).

Perhaps some of these subtle nuances also are reflected in the earlier gaps between virtual delivery and physical uptake over lockdown. It also relates to the wider training and support needed to get people and families enabled in community online infrastructure that currently lack digital skills, hardware or software. Remember for many families mentioned earlier a tablet, dongle or credit for the internet was the facilitator for enabling sport participation not a pair of trainers, bus fare or membership fee. This illustrates the strange blurred narrative of COVID-19's legacy for the sector.

Social motivation

According to our 'active' participants, a critical enabling factor in adopting and maintaining an active lifestyle throughout the pandemic was their various support networks, such as friends, family, social media, and community service providers. Our participants stressed that these different sources of support acted as key forms of motivation. For example, Oscar found the validation from Strava and encouragement from his sister to be really inspirational, whereas Chris found the opportunities for social interaction to be motivational:

> "When I started running my sister was really helpful because she, she persuaded me to running with her. So for the first month or two of lock down, we were doing runs, you know, every

three times a week, let's say, and, you know, working on the coach to 5k, to get good running and we completed it as well. […] Yeah, it was helpful to have my sister motivating me and I don't feel like I could have done it without, her. Yeah, in fact, you know, my fitness definitely would have suffered if my sister hadn't persuaded me to go running with her"

(Oscar, Merseyside).

"Yes, I do use Strava because it is quite nice to get kudos every so often from some of our friends because, obviously it was nice to get recognition. Strava also acts a motivation because it lets you look at, if you're improving. Strava is really good at pinpointing what you've improved at. And so that's really good for your self-confidence. And yet, your willingness to run again the next time. And the kudos is really nice, I only have like three friends. But the one piece of kudos that I get is, is really good. I like getting that"

(Oscar, Merseyside).

"I had started cycling with friends as well, that was three friends, three different friends with whom I would go on bike rides, and different types of bike rides. With some of them, it would be like a short ride and then they would get tired basically and visit another friend. That was a nice long bike rides. [...] The sort of engagement with friends is of particular significance. Because there were so few other opportunities to do so. You couldn't go to each other's houses or go out to restaurants; you have to do very little, in fact, and the cycling was a substitute for that social contract, which I was very happy to have"

(Chris, Merseyside).

"Now, I was at home from home on the world that is from March until September, which is when I got a job in London. And during that time, Alan the badminton coach from Cheshire county that I've talked about he was he started to do the outdoor badminton sessions, where it wasn't all badminton and it was sort of plyometric training and some running and hill sprints; a variety of different fitness things, I think from his perspective as a substitute income. But from our perspective, it was really useful to have that and he had outdoor badminton nets and shuttles and so when the wind was low, we actually could play a little bit. And I was really, really glad that he did that. Because I had actually started taking running as well over lockdown, and I've kept that up going back twice a week. And that was that was all I was doing and then, I was just really glad Alan did those sessions, I just really, really enjoyed them. Partly just because of maintaining that social contact. But also because it was the closest thing I could get to badminton during lockdown. […] Yeah, yeah. I mean, that that really was the opportunity in itself. So he started arranging in a car park, in Ellesmere port started arranging these sessions. And they would be with up to six people, as the restrictions sort of allowed at the time. And it was once a week for usually two or three hours of work, which was really nice, because it was once a week had been an hour, it would have been a bit of a faff. But it was it was it was longer, it was really nice. And then the cycle, either side of that meant that it was just a day of exercise, which is something I wasn't accustomed to, but which I really enjoyed at the time. So yes, it was a it was, I was very, very glad to have that opportunity

(Chris, Merseyside).

Barriers and challenges

Physical restrictions and social distancing guidelines creating a loss of routine

A key barrier to exercise for those participants who engaged in more traditional sport and physical activity was the disruption to their normal routine. Many individuals highlighted how the social distancing guidelines imposed by government and national governing bodies, which resulted in the

closure of sport facilities and leisure centres, as well as changes to team sport regulations, were a key reason for their reduced activity levels during the pandemic:

> "COVID-19 has completely blocked off any form of social badminton, indoor badminton especially. You can't get into sports centres and play with your friends or anyone really, you can't really train. And so for the first few months of lockdown, we were just sitting at home not doing any badminton at all. […] I think this was the number one barrier, the sports facilities being closed. You can't really play indoor badminton because we don't obviously have an indoor badminton area at home"
>
> (Dan, Merseyside).

> "They've caused a mass panic and things like that. We've already had football teams drop out of the leagues because of this... They're not operating as clubs because people don't want to go. They don't want to mix, don't want to socialize. It's COVID-19 panic around everywhere, isn't it really"
>
> (Andy, Lancashire).

> "I found the lockdown quite difficult because it stopped the gym, it stopped the walks. No, lockdown didn't help. Lockdown hindered it greatly, I thought. I mean, swimming and things like that for people. All the swimming pools closed"
>
> (David, Yorkshire).

For participants who used lifestyle activity as their main source of exercise (i.e., commuting to and from their workplace via cycling or walking) the physical restrictions that lead to workplace closures also significantly disrupted their routine, which as result, reduced their activity levels. For example, Paul explained how he become physically inactive during the pandemic because he was no longer able to engage in his normal daily routine of commuting to and from work and delivering football coaching sessions:

> "Before COVID-19 lockdown hit, my main activity was commuting to work every day on my bike […] All the schools I worked in just obviously shut in March. At that point, that was my working life. It changed a bit subsequently. It meant that I was no longer having my half an hour bike ride in the morning, half an hour bike ride in the afternoon. I was no longer on my feet all day. Our son was at home. I was home-schooling him. My wife was working from home. She was upstairs in the bedroom working. Me and Sam, our son, were trying to [chuckles] make some sort of home-school arrangement go. I lost some of those things which were the everyday routine of exercise. It was just built into my day. It just went […] The football training that I was running obviously stopped for a period as well […] because I have had a strong streak of laziness in me. What worked really well for me prior to the lockdown was that my exercise was just naturally built into my day. I didn't have to make an effort to put on some gym stuff and go out to the gym or go out for a run, I would just get on my bike, ride to work. I'll be on my feet all day, ride back home again. That's the way my life was structured"
>
> (Paul, Greater Manchester).

COVID-19 and associated fear and anxieties

Fears and anxieties about contracting and/or transmission of COVID-19 was another important factor that prevented some of our participants from maintaining an active lifestyle during the pandemic. Specifically, they feared passing the virus onto immediate relatives who were classed as vulnerable or high risk:

> “From a social distance perspective and a health perspective, going back into those environments was concerning when you can't see your family but they're saying you can play sport, there's an element of like, "What a minute? What's right here? What should I be doing? If I've got elderly relatives and I really want to see them, is it right for me to go and play hockey or go and play tag rugby and put them at risk?" It has been a case of seeing someone who may be at risk from the virus more sensitively than myself due to demographics and due to health conditions. I suppose the tag rugby element we were more conscious of because we're all touching the same ball, so it's a little bit hypocritical. It's all very well to sterilize everything at half time, but unlike hockey, at least you're not touching the ball. We are hitting it with something else, and no one's touching it”
>
> (Katie, Greater Manchester).

> “The problem with me is as well, I care for my 84-year-old mum. So, I had to basically stop in, so I wasn't risking passing it on to her. You know what I mean? […] I were wary about if I came into contact with anybody, I were worried about what I would pass on to my mum, plus it was really-- Well it still is. Nobody knows really what's going off, do they? […] [I felt] fed up. Stuck in the house. ... I'd say for first three weeks or so I didn't really go out hardly at all. Just taking the dogs out, just to walk round block with dog. I didn't really do my miles. […] I noticed as well, in lockdown, there were more and more people out and you constantly seem to be bumping into-- and you're not jumping barriers or anything like that. People aren't sanitizing or whatever -- It were in my mind that”
>
> (Thomas, Yorkshire).

> “It's such a shame that when COVID-19 kicked in, it’s just ruined everything in a way spoilt it. [...] at the moment because my dad's older I can't really get out of the house ... it's frustrating because I can't really do what I want- but I get it. My dad's supporting me... I don't want him to catch anything”
>
> (Nathan, Lancashire).

Fear and anxiety is obviously an interconnected theme with many of the other drivers of behaviour for individuals during such an unprecedented global pandemic. It may also be an ongoing theme when it comes to the return to community sport setting for the United Kingdom population. It also worth noting here that the evidence from the quantitative data suggested that this was less of an issue for men and women who are already engaged in sport. The more nuanced granular data we have interrogated shows far more complexity around this decision making in community sport.

Lack of motivation

Another regularly cited barrier to an active lifestyle across our sample was the social-isolation effect. Many participants highlighted how spending increased time in their households due to the pandemic, especially during the months of lockdown, impacted their physical activity levels. They explained how they became demotivated to engage with exercise because they were unable to interact with others, not required to move around for work purposes, and more generally because there was no requirement to leave the home:

> “It's really hard to motivate yourself when you're alone. I was working out on Zoom, but it's so isolated even more because everybody is muted, you're just watching a screen. It's not got the same atmosphere as you would if you were with other people. I think getting up, getting out, and getting on with it helps you to stay motivated, but when you've only got to get up to stay in your house and not have anywhere to go, it's really hard to push yourself to keep going. I'm going to say it was 100% harder, especially during the middle, the middle of lockdown was

really, really like, I wasn't doing anything, I'd given up […] the beginning I assumed everything was going to be quite short term in lines of what I would do for a living, it was hopeful that we'd return after Easter. In the meantime, it was easy to keep fit. You knew it wasn't going to be for a long time. Then after Easter came and restrictions just got tighter and tighter and then the ultimate goal of returning to work wasn't there"

(Susan, Greater Manchester).

"Actually, finding that drive and motivation was really, really challenging, and having that taken away when you do rely on it to see the people was extremely difficult […] when we were in full lockdown. The challenge is motivation because I think the more you're sedentary, the harder it is to get you moving. When you are sat on the sofa, that said for myself, I don't want to keep going on, but when you are living in one room, as much as I love my flat, it is a one-bed flat, so I just live out of one room. When I was working and I wasn't on furlough, your one room is your cooking space, your workspace, your workout space, your downtime space. It was everything. It's easy to become less motivated I think and less driven. You have to be really, really structured […] as an active person before, and someone that tries to pride myself on being active and try and keep positive in that sense, I struggled with motivation on a few days when I came to the conclusion that I'd not been out for about three days or four days. It's like, "What is going on?" Literally, just make yourself go for a walk. It is that drive and motivation that took the biggest impact on activity […] the motivation to be active, I think definitely in the months where it was a complete lockdown, I found it really challenging […] can't lie, is because you do get into that routine of a sedentary lifestyle inside. You're not walking around being active. You're not even walking around in the office or even going from A to B driving to the office and getting out and walking from the car, and there's different stimuli around you. It is just that same four walls […] if you had a bit of a day where you're thinking, "God, this is a bit-- it's hard, it's challenging." Whilst you know exercise will help, at that moment in time, sometimes it wasn't exactly what you wanted to do. It was a real effort to make yourself go outside and go for a walk"

(Katie, Greater Manchester).

"The whole thing just seemed to slip away a bit. It was more difficult to get him out of the house at times. He lost some of his motivation generally about everything. He was keen just to sit in the house. Probably after a couple of months of the lockdown, some of that stuff started to slip away a bit, and we were really not getting out as much as we wanted to […] the barriers for me were about family dynamics, about me trying to persuade our son to get out of the house […] Sam, who became just very demotivated about lots of things, so a suggestion that came from me would generally invite a no response, would get a no response from him. Us going out together and doing exercise, he just got, "No, I don't want to do that." That was my barrier"

(Paul, Greater Manchester).

SECTION 7: Conclusions – current challenges and future directions

Undoubtedly, the global pandemic has shaped existing and future sport, exercise and community sport provision and participation in England probably in a way not seen since World War 2 (Tovar, 2020). The true scale is hard to quantify, with some estimates suggesting a loss of 700million sport and leisure visits to the recreation facility industry (UK Active, 2020) at a cost of £2.1 billion. What this macro level analysis does not illustrate however is that movement between leisure and recreation choices has occurred. Outdoor recreation, itself an industry worth an estimated £21 billion (Mackintosh, Griggs and Tate, 2019) has arguably experienced growth due to the very nature of indoor space restriction. Projected booms in online and offline virtual and at home leisure were short lived it seems with some success for some individuals and restricted and excluded experiences for others living beyond the digital divide. For example analysis of Google Trend data shows searches for 'free online workouts', 'indoor exercise' and 'home workouts' rose steeply at the initial lockdown in mid-March then sharply fell away by May (UK Active, 2020). With other data developed with the voluntary sector, key issues emerged that parallel our own findings around charity and volunteer group leadership. These included fears of the pressure of uncertainty, organisational and management delivery challenges and need for online-only working methods (VCSE, 2020).

Participants formed a core part of this study and a key theme for them was the variable access to physical infrastructure relating to outdoor spaces, canal towpaths and parks. This offers an opportunity to recognise the ability and need to change spaces for local communities so we 'design-in' activity opportunities. This is an opportunity for environmental 'nudges' in how and where to use local spaces for sport and physical activity. Likewise, for the 'newly introduced' participants during COVID-19 the question is how to retain, but also for NGBs and sport clubs to be aware some individuals seem happy with new lifestyles and not all will return in their 'exit pathway' to normal community sport. The boost to walking and cycling recreationally is outside the remit of NGBs and formal clubs. This is a vital area of work that needs to be considered beyond traditional silos of NGBs and local government.

Many of the 21 organisations interviewed showed considerable capacity for organisational adaptability and innovation. Using the model applied in this fieldwork, we found strong evidence of organisations retrenchment where they navigated survival through efficiency savings. Further to this repositioning of organisations has led to a new generate of innovations, new 'offers' and potential for future sport development partnerships. Finally, evidence of restructuring was clear through redeployment, furloughing and the re-imagining of the form and function of some sporting structures. There was a clear collective response by the sector to deal with the pandemic and stark examples of endeavours by the third sector and others to play a vital role in the provision of welfare services.

Differential approaches to managing the crisis by Active Partnerships, Local Government, Public Health agencies and NGBs. Differential impacts that likely exacerbate existing stubborn inequalities.

Data in the national Sevanta COMRES survey is not sufficient sample size or longitudinal in nature to be able to say confidently how there has been a system impact across the North of England. But, it does provide an indicative picture in an incomplete data environment during a period of huge flux. Part of the learning from this project has been that the hard rules of methodology need to be considered when excluded groups will be ever more excluded in multiple ways.

One specific area of division within the increasingly disconnected delivery system is that of a growing 'Technological divide' where digital poverty prevents individuals from more deprived backgrounds accessing new innovative ways of accessing sport and tools to develop pathways in participation. Secondly, we need to revisit the assumption around the transfer from 'live', in person to virtual sessions where the majority of work done saw a drop in participation. For large group use of technology there were considerable challenges compared to some gains for individuals that did have access to technology. There is considerable scope for sport development professionals and agencies to understand more about this area of policy and practice. Indeed academic research in this area is still in its infancy. As Sallis et al (2020;13) argue,

"although e-health modes of delivery seem most applicable when physical distancing is required, access to and cultural acceptability of internet based technologies is far from universal, so other delivery modes such as print or telephone may be needed dependent upon the target group"

Data and insight opportunities beyond self-report data (Active People and Active Lives style surveys) from technology are powerful. But, it is also important to note that such studies and cohort assessment are potentially also exclusionary for those without digital literacy and devices. Again, the temptation gather mass data on incomplete pictures is ever present. Granular evidence and detail gathered at the local level on local people and communities has shown to be a powerful vaccine to shoring up civil society agencies against the pandemic and associated economic and societal stressors. No level of national statistics can replace communication with fellow community members in times of crisis.

Support for communities, organisations and individuals is key to helping them navigate the pandemic situation. Support ranged from use of Apps and technology to remain individually active to the ability to communicate with users and club members who previously had limited engagement with information technology. Support also seems to be differential based on the areas the project focused upon. In other words lower socio-economic and more deprived communities failed to navigate funding, support and networks as other areas of the community sport infrastructure did.

Finally, with around 11 million sports club members representing around 25% of the English population, and over 3 million sport coaches in the United Kingdom it is clear that the pandemic has shaped a core aspect of British society since March 17th 2020. But the more daunting question is how with only 20% of sport and leisure facility stock now in 'public' local government hands how government can respond to this considerable challenge (Mackintosh, 2020; King, 2015; Widdop et al,

2019). Only a coordinated effort to work across charity, voluntary sector, social enterprises, local government, private gyms and leisure operators and NGBs can meet the considerable, likely long-term issues presented in this report. With an ongoing DCMS select committee inquiry into community sport and sport governance and a House of Lords Inquiry into grass roots sport and the need for a National Plan for Sport and Recreation(DCMS, 2020; House of Lords, 2020). It is our assertion that a joined up task force is need to cut across the multitude of complex stakeholders. Only in pooling insight, data, ideas, best practice and trend information for the collective good of the sport and physical sector can we start to move forward with a genuine understanding of the baseline that this report has started to establish in the northern region of England. Navigating ways forward to recover and build 'exit pathways' form the crisis in a post-vaccine landscape is a starting point not a conclusion to this challenge.

SECTION 8: Recommendations

All five of our core recommendations are underpinned by a *participatory co-creation approach*. This is assumed to be an approach that can operate at multiple levels from national (even international) level through to regional sub systems and local community agencies representing individuals. Co-production is about the co-design of anchors for moving forward as a country. Not working in isolation to deliver a vision for crisis response in differentially impacted places.

Recommendation 1: *Social inequality and connectedness to the sport and physical activity system in grass roots settings*

To specifically understand deprivation and social inequalities as causes of disconnection from the sport and physical activity system amplified during the pandemic. To employ asset based community development (ABCD) techniques and approaches to re-engage with these communities to build resilience and sustainability.

Recommendation 2: *National sport and physical activity policy and local responses to change – the role of Active Partnerships, public health and local government in information sharing*

To acknowledge the vital role of the Active Partnership in rebuilding community sport and physical activity infrastructure post-pandemic. Specifically in terms of regional and local leadership and sharing of best practice across geographical boundaries.

Recommendation 3: *Digital divide in communication and accessibility to new delivery methods*

To better understand and navigate the digital poverty in some regions and the implications for sport and physical activity. This also includes the current reliance on digital methods for recruitment and retainment of participants, coaches and volunteers.

Recommendation 4: *Need for different ways of working: with a likely operational legacy for the sector post lockdown 2.0*

To better understand 'what works' in the new post-pandemic world through a shared national collective endeavour of information and piloting of innovation.

Recommendation 5: *A new research baseline for 'what works' to shape sector understanding*

To design and implement a national set of research methodologies with collective cross sector buy-in that can give a state of the national benchmark for organisational and participant involvement in sport and physical activity.

5a. Build a longitudinal survey tool that embraces a set of representative sample of organisations navigating Lockdown 2.0 and post-pandemic 'opening up' to capture sector-wide insight and information to inform collaboration.

5b. To commence a pilot set of case studies to examine resilience, repositioning and restructuring in the sector.

SECTION 9: Future outcomes and outputs:

- ✓ The original goal was for a September/Oct 2020 presentation of qualitative findings to all regional Active Partnerships (report and summary and virtual presentation). The report was delivered to a revised deadline of December 10th due to the impact of Covid-19.
- ✓ July 2021 UK Sport Development Network (UKSDN) virtual conference on community sport impacts on COVID-19 by Leeds Beckett University.
- ✓ Edited book collection – proposal to Routledge by Active Partnerships and Manchester Metropolitan University.
- ✓ Longitudinal data survey for NGBs and Community sport operators (proposal in development) – pump prime support being sought from potential national agencies including Sport England, Sport Scotland, Sport Wales and Sport Northern Ireland (January 2021).

- ✓ **Academic papers (in development 2021)**
    - Mackintosh, C. Thompson, A, Ives, B., Gale, L. Stanniford, L., Daniels, J., Sims, D. Oldfield, S., Kolic, P. (2021) A Study of Crisis Management in Sport Policy during a time of COVID-19.
    - Mackintosh, C. Ives, B., Thompson, A, Gale, L. Stanniford, L., Sims, D., Oldfield, S., Daniels, J. Kolic, P. (2021) Shifting sport and wellbeing identities during COVID-19 pandemic in England.
    - Stanniford, L., Mackintosh, C. Thompson, A, Ives, B., Gale, L. Sims, D., Oldfield, S., Daniels, J., Kolic, P. (2021) An analysis of behaviour change in community sport participation amongst lower socio-economic and ethnic minority groups during and after the COVID-19 'lockdown'.

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